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By H. Bedford-Jones

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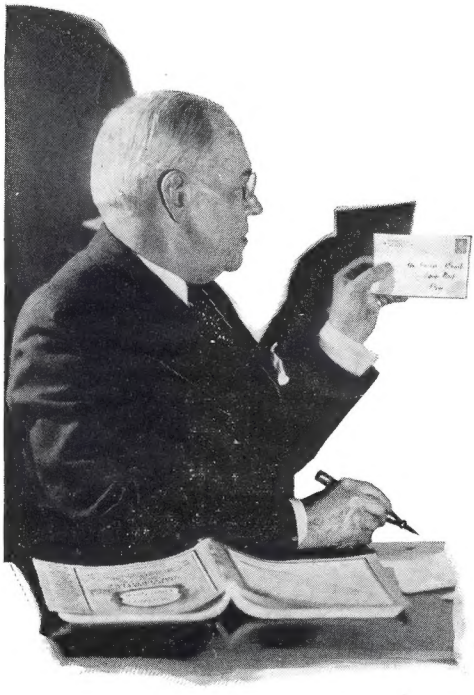

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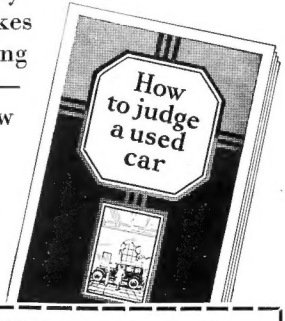

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A Novelette of

Strange Cargoes

on Malay Seas

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

NORTH

CHAPTER I

A HALF MILLION MYSTERY

IF YOU know Singapore at all it is quite needless to describe the offices of Mengleberg, Inc.—the shipping, insurance and general trading people in Hangchow Road. You recall the dignified, dingy exterior, the bustling, well lighted offices, the swarms of clerks, the polite Dutch managers, the queer little globelike electric fans, the oil paintings of steamers and clipper ships adorning the walls.

Still, you may not know the inner and secluded sanctum of Herman Mengleberg himself, into which Tom Carstairs was being shown. Few do know it, but since Carstairs told me the details, they are probably accurate. The place was bare as a bone except for a phonograph, a flat desk, a letter file and two uncomfortable chairs; but the bareness was something beautiful, since walls and floor were of the Philippine hardwood in which the early Menglebergs had piled up a fortune, and they were polished to the nines. The windows were of glazed glass so no one could look out or in, distracting business.

Herman Mengleberg, who looked up and nodded as Carstairs entered, was a skinny little old man who played big poker out on the Bubbling Well Road and chuckled over his losses; but in his office he was never separated from a single dollar Mex without a battery of machine guns and a lodge of sorrow. Carstairs knew there was something up when Mengleberg shoved his spectacles over his forehead, patted his bald dome and produced a box of good cheroots.

"Sit down, Mr. Carstairs, sit down. And how is everything with you this fine morning? Is the brokerage business good?"

Carstairs chuckled. Nobody, not even

OF SINGAPORE

the Dutchmen in the outer office, knew that he worked for Mengleberg, Inc., and that his brokerage office was a bluff.

"Fine, Herman," he rejoined, taking a cheroot. "Work in prospect?"

"These agents make me sick, Tom," complained Mengleberg. "They go and run me into the hole and I'd die a pauper if it wasn't for you."

"Fine," said Carstairs cheerfully, biting at his cheroot. "I want an advance in salary if I'm to save you from a pauper's grave."

"Eh? This is nothing to joke about, my friend!" said the other. "Listen to me now, and do not joke again, for I have a bad heart. The *Voordam* has been chartered for a trip to Saigon with mixed

cargo, which is good. She has been chartered for the return trip, which is also good."

"Looks too good, eh?" said Carstairs.

"Wait." Mengleberg caressed his bald brow again, and looked highly distressed. "This return charter party is to a man named Dubois, a Frenchman, who seems not well known; the cargo is a mixed lot of choice hardwoods, some silk, spice and a lot of very fine porcelains brought out of China. It is valuable. That foolish agent of mine in Saigon has already insured it for fifty thousand pounds and thinks it is fine business."

"Eh?" The eyes of Carstairs became alert. "Half a million Mex — whew! Yes, a good stroke of business—if! Where's the joker, Herman?"

"We shall see, my friend. That is what I want to ask you. I find that Lloyds have already refused the insurance because they do not know this man. My agent finds that he is an exporter, which means nothing, and says he is a gentleman. Well, well, perhaps that is so, but I do not like gentlemen who make a profession of it. I like a man who has a business. And I have had a dream of running water for three nights, which you know is a bad sign."

Carstairs did not smile, for he knew Mengleberg was not such a believer in dreams as he professed—not by a good deal.

"Looks O. K. to me, Herman," he said. "What did your dream tell you?"

"It made me think about the *Hoang Soy*," came the reply. "That was in 1926. She went from Hongkong to Kuching with a charter and had a charter back, which was luck. She brought back a load of hard camphor and such stuff for a trader in those parts, who went along as a passenger; and she wasn't heard from again, ever. Then there was the *David Bolling* last year—you remember her? Some chap turned up in Batavia and chartered her for Sabang with a cargo of expensive machinery, and he went along with her; and she hasn't got to Sabang yet—never heard from."

The lazy manner of Carstairs had fallen away; he was incisive, concentrated, eager.

"Queer, Herman. You think there's something phony about this Dubois, eh? But in these other cases, the trader, for instance. If he never showed up, who collected the insurance?"

"Lawyers." Mengleberg fairly spat out the word. He liked lawyers about as much as some women like cats. "It was collected, right enough."

Carstairs nodded. To look at him you would think he was not so much. Not tall, with a face like any other man, hair a bit sun bleached; regular features, inconspicuous in a crowd. But see him stripped on a ship's deck, with lascars emptying buckets of water over him, and you might look twice. Like silk, he was; no bulging muscle but all steel, and some few scars here and there on his body. His eyes were wide, reflective, and they could be cold and deadly at times. He did not look like an American, but like a five button Englishman who knew his way around.

"Now, my friend," continued Mengleberg, "I would be very sad if the *Voordam* went the way of those other ships. I would not care about the *Voordam;* on her I would collect insurance, not pay it. But that foolish agent of mine in Saigon has insured her cargo with us, you understand? And the lawyers would collect it, too, if she disappeared."

Carstairs could see the point—an expensive, gold-plated point. Mengleberg knew nothing, but he suspected much. If this was a game, it was an old trick dressed up in new clothes, and ominous clothes. Only an exceptional gang could pull it off. To make a ship vanish was not easy. To make her crew vanish was even less easy. Any man who could do such a thing in order to make money, must be an able criminal and an able man to boot.

"Well, speak up," said Carstairs. "You think it's fake cargo? It must be, if anything's crooked. Then it could be examined before loading."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Mengleberg with

heavy sarcasm. "All but the hardwoods is shipped out of French China in bond, to be transshipped here in bond; and that foolish agent of mine did not make an examination. And the insurance is issued. The stuff is in our godown at Saigon now, ready for loading; but it is in the bonded compartment."

"Not so bad," said Carstairs lightly. "I haven't been in French territory for a couple of years, but it'd be funny if we couldn't work it—slip in and open up a few cases or bales. A little *cumshaw* will go a long way with the French boys, you know—"

MR. MENGLEBERG held up both hands and rolled his eyes to high heaven.

"Listen to the man—and he has the nerve to ask me for more salary. Anybody, my friend, who talks about bribes in Indo-China does not know his business and therefore I should lower his wages ten per cent. But I will forgive you, my friend, because you have been working in other quarters. Since that big scandal last year, there is no *cumshaw* in Saigon, you understand? Those frog eaters are scared stiff and if anybody tries to offer a bribe he is arrested on the spot. Everything and every one is watched, and they tell me the government has shipped out seventeen cases of uniform buttons because all the customs officials are so nervous that they have shaken the buttons off their uniforms. That is true, my friend. I should be extremely sorry if you tried to bribe any Frenchman up there, and I would not send you my lawyers."

Carstairs grinned at this.

"All right, Herman, shoot the works," he said. "How d'you want me to save your fifty thousand pounds?"

"The *Voordam* sailed yesterday," said Mengleberg, "but you know she is a slow old barge, and I have sent a long wireless to Cap'n Freeman. He will discharge his supercargo at Saigon and you will be hired. You can catch the Messageries boat north tonight and have a day or two to spare in Saigon with the French girls, and maybe you can pick up something. You understand, my friend, we must not be hasty. This is good business, very good business, if it is straight, and I do not want to spoil good business. But if it is crooked, then I do not want to wear any mourning band for that fifty thousand pounds."

"Sure," said Carstairs. "But you know our agreement as to commission on such jobs as this, Herman. The usual ten per cent. goes, eh?"

"My friend, my friend, this is not a usual job!" said Mengleberg with an expression of horror. "No, this is merely suspicion, you understand, and there is no risk involved. If there is anything wrong you will send me a wireless and I will do the rest. No, my friend; one per cent. is very high commission in such a case, too high altogether, but I'll pay it."

"All right, Herman," nodded Carstairs. "You get your one per cent. man on the job, because I've got a week end date up in the hills at Colonel Talbot's bungalow."

"Bluff!" said Mengleberg, but looked uneasy. Then he brightened. "Listen. You remember the little girl who was here last month, eh? The American widow who is a peach? She is at Saigon now. I know, because my foolish agent there cabled about cashing a large check for her and I told him she was O. K. Now listen, my boy. You take my advice. You go up to Saigon and you marry that widow. She is a peach, and she is rich, and you are made for life."

Carstairs chuckled.

"So you haven't forgotten Mary Fleming, eh? She hit you pretty hard at bridge, I heard. Well, Mephisto, you tempt me. She's a good scout, and I'd like to see her again, for a fact. I'll come down to seven and a half per cent., which is pretty low, but I'll accept it in this case."

Mengleberg looked at him with an air of startled concern.

"My friend, what you ask is impossible," he said flatly. "Think of it, just think of what that commission would mean—on fifty thousand pounds—if there is crooked work."

"Sure. I'm thinking of it—" And Car-

stairs chuckled again. "Our working agreement is ten per cent. too. As you say, I don't have to spend weeks at this job and go over books and play Old Sleuth, so I'll come down to seven and a half and be generous about it."

"My Lord! If that is what you call being generous, what would you call being tight?" said Mengleberg. "Come, we are good friends; you would not be too hard on an old man like me, I know it. I have your interest at heart, Tom. I will give you two per cent., eh?"

They talked at length. The upshot was that, if there were anything crooked on hand and Tom Carstairs could prove it and check it, he would have five per cent. of the fifty thousand pounds he would save Mengleberg, Inc. Which was fair enough.

Thanks to a father in the consular service, Carstairs had spent most of his life in the Orient. His knowledge of men and places, dialects and customs, was astonishing in so young a man. He was not yet thirty. For seven years he had been associated with Herman Mengleberg, and the fact was not yet known, even to the office force of Mengleberg, Inc. Which spoke volumes for the efficiency of Tom Carstairs. In Singapore, where the business of every man is known, where gossip floats on the tongue of Sikh and Chinese, Hindu and Malay, where rumor drifts from bungalow to bungalow, from office to office—any secret service man, private or government, has a terribly hard time of it.

However, Carstairs thrived. And Herman Mengleberg was far from guessing that his little shot about Mary Fleming had gone home, square to the bull's-eye.

CHAPTER II

SAIGON

ANY guidebook can give a description of the broad, tree lined streets of Saigon, the "Little Paris" of the Orient, so there is no point in outlining the impressions of Tom Carstairs during his first day in the city. He had been there before.

From the local agent of Mengleberg, Inc. he learned very little. Dubois was a handsome and distinguished French gentleman who had come there six months previously with letters of introduction from Paris, then had gone up country. He had returned lately to Saigon, evidently having been successful in trading up in Yunnan, and had put some money into the hardwoods he was taking back to France. He was a gentleman of position, lived at the Saigon Club, and was not addicted to any of the pleasurable vices which Saigon can offer in profusion to visitors.

Carstairs did not arrive with any pounding of drums or blowing of trumpets. His sun helmet was old, his whites were rather seedy, and his suitcase was shabby; he looked exactly like a white man who was down at heel and anxious to pick up anything. He went to a cheap hotel near the Hotel de la Marine, on the waterfront, and he kept away from the exclusive west end of town.

He was in the Mengleberg office early next morning. The agent knew only that he bore a letter from the Singapore office asking that he be given any opening that might turn up on any of the company's ships, and now came to him with a cordial greeting.

"Good day, Monsieur Carstairs. I have just received a wireless from the captain of the *Voordam*, due in tomorrow. He is discharging his supercargo and asks me to find a suitable man for the place. How do you like the idea?"

M. Carstairs liked it, discussed wages, and the bargain was struck. At this moment a rickshaw drew up before the doors, and Dubois entered.

Carstairs liked the look of the man; any one would. He was larger than most Frenchmen, lithe, square shouldered, with a finely set head. His features were regular, square, challenging; at first glance they were harsh and cold, but this dissonance vanished when he spoke. He was actually charming. The only trouble with charming men is that very often they find

it easy to live by means of this gift of the gods.

"Well, what news of our ship?" Dubois hailed the agent. "Today? Tomorrow? Next week?"

"Tomorrow, M. Dubois," returned the agent. "She'll be up the channel and berthed before sunset. I'll have all arrangements made to get the cargo right out of her and I think three days will see her in shape."

"Good!" said Dubois, and gave Carstairs a sharp look that swept him from tip to toe.

The agent introduced them, showing the wireless he had received, and explaining that Carstairs would act as supercargo. Dubois shook hands and spoke in fluent English, and instantly Tom Carstairs had the impression that he was dealing with a steel image, not a man.

"Very glad, Mr. Carstairs, very glad. You're an Englishman?"

"No, an American," said Carstairs.

"Excellent." Dubois showed white teeth beneath his black mustache. "I like Americans, I may say. Where are you stopping?"

Carstairs named his hotel. Dubois shrugged.

"Miserable hole. Nonsense, my dear chap, take your things up to the Grand and let me foot the bill. You will?"

"Thank you, sir," said Carstairs, "but it's hardly worth while. I'll go aboard ship as soon as she's berthed, you know."

"Oh, quite so." Dubois nodded, and dipped into his pocket. "Here, let me give you a card to the club, at all events. No, don't mention it—you'll find the liquor very decent there." Waving aside the protestations and thanks of Carstairs, he turned to the agent. "By the way, I believe the *Voordam* has a license for passengers?"

"Yes, m'sieu," returned the agent, with a shrug. "But she has only half a dozen cabins and will carry none this trip. You were explicit on this point, if you remember."

"Certainly," said Dubois. "However, we'll have one at least—an American lady who is anxious to return to Singapore and prefers a slow boat. A Mrs. Fleming. I'll give you full details for the necessary formalities in the morning. Come along, Mr. Carstairs, and we'll drop in at the club for a nip, if you like."

Mr. Carstairs was charmed. He was also staggered by what he had just heard, and he was astonished by the surprising hospitality of Dubois. In his experience things were seldom done this way. So, as usual when in doubt, he kept silent and played the little clerk.

Mary Fleming—going back to Singapore. Why? And with Dubois. Why? He knew she was a widow, still under thirty, not beautiful, but none the less one of the most entirely charming women he had ever met. Her sole ambition in life was, apparently, to travel and enjoy life. Tom Carstairs thought privately that her real object was to forget the late Mr. Fleming and drown sorrow. Which may serve to indicate the dangerous state of mind of said Tom Carstairs, who was as a rule a most unsentimental young man.

ON THE way to the beautifully situated club, Monsieur Dubois spared no pains to put his guest at ease, and Carstairs gradually but cautiously unbent. True, he remained the petty clerk, but he revealed himself as a person temporarily hard up who had seen better days, and in no long time Dubois was convinced that he had found a very amiable companion.

In fact, Dubois was soon reveling in his find. After the second drink he touched upon various adventures, and Carstairs begged for more in a wide eyed, fascinated way which would have flattered any man with the least bump of vanity. Thus Carstairs, while lighting upon nothing in any way suspicious, did elicit the fact that M. Dubois had seen a good deal of the Oriental world, and knew it very thoroughly—a perhaps important point. But M. Dubois was far, very far, from guessing that the somewhat *gauche* young man who listened so avidly to his tales, knew the Orient and its languages and its ways

far better than he could ever hope to know them.

"Come, my friend," said Dubois, suddenly glancing at his watch. "I have an engagement for luncheon. You shall come with me. A charming lady, also an American, who sails upon our voyage past the Cambodian shores. You rank as one of the ship's officers; you must meet her."

"I'd be very glad," said Carstairs.

Since he had to do the business sooner or later, he reflected, he might better do it now. Mary Fleming was no fool. She would not blurt out some silly exclamation as to how a man whom she had met at Government House in Singapore could be a supercargo in Saigon. Still, if she were fool enough to fall for a handsome Frenchman . . .

It left a bad taste in Carstairs' mouth. He wanted to find what was behind it. He could uncover no hint of rascality in Dubois—but every man slips up somewhere. If there were anything crooked in this business, Dubois might have unwittingly slipped up in his relations with Mary Fleming.

So they rode down to the Brasserie du Nord, and Dubois settled at a corner table of the glassed in terrace, and over an *apéritif* they watched the yellow, brown and bronzed world go past on the avenue. Until, abruptly, a rickshaw drew up and Mary Fleming alighted.

Dubois was out on the sidewalk instantly, bowing over her hand in his gallant fashion, while Carstairs remained at the table, watching. He saw the gaze of Mary Fleming sweep to him, knew that Dubois was telling her about him. He came to his feet and waited, politely, looking at her in a perfectly blank manner.

She was just the same—a slim, slender little woman giving an impression of vivacity and fluttering silks. Nothing pretty about her; her hair that was neither yellow nor brown, eyes blue enough, with a peculiar slant; features and skin indifferent to creams and pomades; a figure of no extraordinary interest. Yet, with all this, a keen and vibrantly eager personality, a look that went in deep and square and firm, a warm handgrip. Not a woman to flatter and play with, thought Carstairs, but a woman to live with year in and year out.

He found himself shaking hands, looking into her astonished eyes, speaking calmly:

"I'm very glad to meet you, Mrs. Fleming, and to know that we'll have you aboard us on the way down. From what I've heard of her, the *Voordam* isn't a very elegant old barge, but I expect we can make you comfortable. You're from home, eh?"

"Yes, from Dallas," came the vibrant voice, as her eyes searched him curiously. "You're not a Texan, Mr. Carstairs?"

She had asked him the same question in Singapore, and now he made the same answer.

"No, I'm a Buckeye, according to the family tree, but I've lived around all my life, a hobo from home."

She remembered then. He could see it in her eyes and face. Dubois intervened, fortunately, and held a chair for her; she adjusted herself in it, and Carstairs knew that now all danger was past. Dubois glanced at him with a friendly laugh.

"I'm afraid Carstairs does himself injustice, Mrs. Fleming. He isn't a tramp, you know. He's only been out here a few months; what they call a 'griffin' up north. I think we'll have a pleasant bit of a voyage. Bridge, Carstairs?"

"I play a little," said Carstairs. "I'm a dud at the game, though."

Mary Fleming gave him a quick, almost startled look; in it he could see that she remembered how he had played in Singapore—"the ideal partner", she had called him. Carstairs chuckled to himself. She was getting more mystified every moment.

CARSTAIRS enjoyed himself as the luncheon proceeded. More and more clearly Mary Fleming comprehended each instant that he was the man she had known in Singapore, but that Dubois

knew nothing of him, that here he was playing a part and playing it well. And, realizing this, knowing him fairly well, she proceeded to prod him with questions as to his intimate activities and history, taking a malicious pleasure in stumping him or attempting to do so. Carstairs lied nobly, and she knew that he lied; but she did not say so.

They were lingering over coffee and cognac when Mrs. Fleming inquired as to the exact time of going aboard. Dubois offered to telephone the Mengleberg agent, who would be at his home during the noon hour, and so departed to struggle with the Saigon central. Mrs. Fleming sat back and gazed at Carstairs.

"Well?" she inquired. "The reason for this amazing imposture?"

"Gladly," said Carstairs, "on one condition. The reason for your return to Singapore?"

Her face broke into impish laughter.

"To meet you again, of course."

"Thank you." The level gray eyes of Carstairs were dancing. "That is exactly the reason I came here—to meet you again."

"Fair enough." She leaned forward, suddenly earnest, tense. "Come, tell me the truth. Why don't you want Mr. Dubois to know who you are? Why shouldn't he know you're a broker?"

Carstairs shrugged, and spoke impulsively.

"Because I'm no such thing, Mrs. Fleming. You're the only person to whom I've made the admission. No one in Singapore, even, knows what I really am. So come, tell me the truth yourself. Why are you going back there?"

"Oh!" She leaned back again and gave him a laughing sidelong glance. "Don't you know that all widows are looking for men? Perhaps I'll marry Mr. Dubois."

Carstairs flushed suddenly, then smiled.

"I know you too well for that to take, believe me. Don't give me away, and before we reach Singapore I'll make a full confession. He's coming back now."

"Is it a promise?" she inquired.

"Word of honor," said Carstairs gravely, as Dubois rejoined them.

"You can go aboard tomorrow night if you wish, Mrs. Fleming," he said. "They'll have a cabin ready for you by then. The ship will be in this afternoon. Just when we sail isn't certain so far."

Carstairs rose and took his departure, under pretense of having packing to do and purchases to make.

Refusing a rickshaw, he showed his assumed ignorance of the country by walking, which in the heat of the day was an absurdity compassed only by tourists and beachcombers. However, he wanted the walk.

He had got absolutely nowhere with his quest, he told himself. As a matter of fact, he liked Dubois very much, although he sensed a certain basic cruelty in the man, a certain cold calculation, hard to define, yet no more than might be found in any man who had made his own way in the world. And Dubois liked the good things of life; his clothes, the handsome sapphire on his finger, his appreciation of the best in everything, went to show this.

"Still, I've got nowhere," reflected Carstairs.

He looked back and saw a flock of white uniforms and gold lace surrounding the table he had just quitted; officers flocked around Mary Fleming as at Singapore. Carstairs grimaced and went on. Where did she come in?

"Flirting with everybody, a gay butterfly enjoying life—hm! Maybe," he thought. "That's the mask she wears, anyhow. Did she spill everything to Dubois the minute my back was turned, in her vanity over knowing something he didn't know? Nine out of ten women would do that. I was a fool to tell her what I did. There's no trusting any of 'em."

Why was she going aboard the *Voordam?* Perhaps as a mere experience, a whim; perhaps in the serious endeavor to capture Dubois. The thought made Carstairs rebel. It did not jibe with his idea of her. And why was she traveling about

the East alone? Most women would have a maid or companion of some kind, particularly if they had financial ease.

Carstairs spent the rest of the day loafing about the harbor, sitting at café tables and watching the water and ships and passing natives, and pondering many things. He was still sitting there late in the afternoon when the *Voordam* came in past the custom house and entered the Arroyo Chinois. She did not go to mooring buoys but made direct for the wharves and was presently neatly berthed beside the Mengleberg godown.

"Time to move," said Carstairs, and hailed a rickshaw.

CHAPTER III

THE GUEST OF DUBOIS

CAPTAIN FREEMAN commanded the *Voordam* not from choice but from necessity, which had embittered him. He was a hard faced, deep eyed man, very harsh, a martinet for discipline, always saying what he thought and damning every one from harbor master to steward without regard for consequences.

"Mengleberg's a fool," he said when Carstairs went aboard with his agent's letter. "He sent me word to send back my supercargo by the first mail boat out of this hellhole and said he'd supply a man. You're it, huh? What d'you know about the job?"

"Talk's cheap, sir," said Carstairs. Freeman looked hard at him, an appraising squint.

"Hm! Fair enough. Mail boat goes out tonight and Van Hoorn with it. See him, go over his manifests and papers, and be ready to check out cargo in the morning. And watch your step with these Frenchmen. They'll steal the shirt off your back before you know it."

Carstairs looked up Van Hoorn, a quiet little Dutchman, and went over the papers with him, and naturally found everything very simple. Van Hoorn, who was already packed, departed in haste to catch his mail boat south. Carstairs had fetched his suitcase aboard and, taking over the cabin, set it to rights. Then he went down to mess and met the other officers, such as had not gone ashore.

The chief engineer was a black haired, vigorous man of forty, named MacAlpin. The first mate, Mr. Conway, was a frustrated specimen of humanity, ungainly, awkward, big mouthed, who knew nothing except his job and full details of all Asiatic vices; not a pleasant man, but an excellent first officer. The wireless man, oddly enough, was actually named Sparks. He was a laughing youngster with a weak mouth and sallow skin, a year out of Vancouver. Owing to his name, he had gone into commercial wireless, he said with a grin.

Carstairs brought the first news of a woman passenger south, and nobody welcomed it over much, except Sparks, who lacked superstition. Cap'n Freeman looked down his nose and swore, the chief grunted something under his breath, and Mr. Conway was about to make some obscene comment when he caught the eye of Carstairs and fell into astonished silence. After this he looked very hard at Carstairs, several times, as though trying to understand something.

For two days Tom Carstairs was a busy man, and saw nothing more of Dubois or Mary Fleming. They came aboard on the third morning, and Dubois stood by with Carstairs and checked over his precious boxes very carefully as they were slung aboard and stowed away in the No. 1 hold. Each box was marked, and Dubois talked a good deal about the contents. This was his precious porcelain, and he certainly knew his subject thoroughly. Carstairs, who knew a little about porcelains himself, was forced to admit that here Dubois could go him one better and then some. Dubois had been buying up old porcelains all over Yunnan, according to his own story, and had a very precious collection for resale in Paris.

Carstairs came to the conclusion that if Herman Mengleberg had been in his shoes, the old gentleman would have cast aside

all his doubts of Dubois. Certainly the Frenchman had a small fortune here, between his silk bales and porcelains. The hardwoods mattered less, but would make a choice profit.

In the afternoon Mary Fleming came and stood beside Carstairs, as he was watching the timbers swung down the big after hatch. Dubois, less interested in the timber, had gone uptown to get off some last letters.

"Well? You look like a working man with your pens, pencils and papers," said Mrs. Fleming cheerfully. Carstairs saluted and shook hands.

"Like your quarters?" he asked. "They aren't wonderful, but the steward worked hard getting them in shape."

"They're better than I expected, thanks," she returned. "Isn't it wonderful to think that we're going to Singapore together?"

"Hm!" Carstairs looked at her for a moment. "No, not a bit of it."

"What?" Her eyes widened on him. "You mean to say you're not as thrilled as I am?"

"Nonsense," he said curtly, and checked a sling that was going down. "You don't mean a word of it, and you know it, Mary Fleming. I'm not a good subject for a flirtation, so far as you're concerned."

His tone of voice brought a flush to her cheeks.

"Just what do you mean by that?" she inquired, her eyes dangerous.

Carstairs gave her a look and a swift smile.

"I mean that I think far too highly of you to have any flirtatious interest in you, Mrs. Fleming; and especially to credit you with any actual interest in me."

"Oh, really?" Her eyes belied her slightly mocking voice. "But aren't you interesting? A mystery is always interesting to a woman!"

"A mystery always intrigues a man," he retorted, "but it may end in becoming too interesting to him— Three, four—five sticks there—"

He made another check, and turned to find her gaze resting on him, suddenly serious.

"You mean there's a mystery about me, Mr. Carstairs?"

"Naturally," he said.

"How fascinating. And just what is it?"

Carstairs broke into laughter.

"My dear lady, that's what I don't know—but I'll find out, as soon as I can put my attention on it. Just at present, I'm responsible for errors here."

"Then I'll take the hint, thank you," and with affected offense, she moved away, but not before Carstairs caught the slightly startled look in her eyes.

Mystery, eh? Perhaps he had lighted on something there.

He laughed a little at thought of her. No, he need not have worried; she was the one in ten who would never give him away to Dubois, as he could tell from the Frenchman's manner toward him. Dubois was very friendly, very genial. He had brought aboard a surprise, in the shape of a tall, pock marked Chinaman man servant, who was going back to France with him, a man from French Yunnan named Yim Li, who spoke fair French. The *Voordam's* steward and cook were Chinese, the men forward and in the black gang were all lascars. The steward, a rotund, pot bellied little Straits Chinaman by the name of Tock, treated Carstairs with deference.

THAT night every one dined ashore. They were getting out by the next noon. Carstairs was the only officer remaining aboard for dinner, while Dubois and Mary Fleming went to the club. As Tock served his lonely meal, Carstairs asked idly how he liked the French Chinaman.

"Him Flench, sar?" Tock made a grimace. "Sabang, mebbe."

"No, from Yunnan," said Carstairs.

"Mebbe Peking, Canton, anywhere," said Tock with scorn. "You look-see. You lissen."

Carstairs looked sharply at him.

"Listen?"

"Uh-huh. You savvy plenty good."

"Oh, is that so?" said Carstairs. "What makes you think so?"

"My blother No. 1 boy along Mist' Meng'berg."

With this delicate shot, Tock grinned and slipped out of the mess cabin, leaving Carstairs blinking. So this yellow boy had at least a suspicion of him, eh? Probably was to be fully trusted, however. Any Chinese working for Mengleberg were hand picked and certified. Carstairs turned his attention to what he had just learned. Yim Li was perhaps from Sabang, but certainly not from Yunnan, a fact easily distinguished by any yellow brother. Then why had Dubois lied about it? Had Yim Li deceived Dubois? Perhaps. Yet Yim Li's papers must be fully in order, since he was bound for France. The tiny discrepancy served to put Carstairs wholly on the *qui vive*. It might mean anything and everything. It assuredly meant something wrong.

Once the hatches were on, Carstairs's work was finished; and they went on at ten the next morning. There was a storm warning in from Cape St. Jacques, and Captain Freeman wanted to get out to sea, so he clapped on the hatches and got away as soon as he was cleared. The pilot was aboard, and in no long time the *Voordam* was sliding out into the long, narrow reaches of the Saigon River that twisted down to the brassy sea.

THE SEA was brassy enough, no doubt of that. When they reached it and dropped the pilot, they headed out into rolling swells of brass under a brazen sky, and the *Voordam* at once showed her true colors. She did everything except stand on her tail, and did that as soon as the wind came down.

There was no rain, only a howl of wind that whipped up the spray and beat down the waves. Dubois left the scene early, somewhat green in the face and looking uncomfortable. Tom Carstairs was on the bridge deck behind the funnels, watching the sea, when Mary Fleming came up to him. It was getting close to sunset.

"What? Is mind triumphant over matter?" he demanded smilingly. "Are you one of those rare persons never rendering unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's?"

She gave him a sidelong glance from her slightly oblique eyes.

"If that's intended as a pun, it's a horrible one," she said. "What are you thinking of? You look at me so queerly."

"Why," said Carstairs soberly, "I was thinking that since meeting you I can for the first time understand the French custom of kissing the hand of a lady."

She met his eyes for a moment, found no laughter there, and the wind whipped color into her face.

"Really?" she said, and tucked a lock of hair into place under her beret. "Some things should really be said with a smile, don't you think?"

Carstairs shrugged.

"No. You smile too much. You wear a mask of frivolity and think that everybody will accept it at face value. But not every one will. Tell me, please, why you came on this trip?"

She was, for the instant, disconcerted, perhaps a little angry.

"M. Dubois invited me, for one thing," she returned.

Carstairs smiled.

"Really? Why did you make him invite you?"

Now the look she flashed him was pregnant with sharp alarm. She turned, facing him.

"Why do you assume the right to question me, Mr. Carstairs?"

"Because I look upon it not as a right, but as a privilege, Mrs. Fleming. If you—"

Without warning, the *Voordam* stood up and tried to spit at the stars. Mary Fleming wore American rubber heels, which have no place on a spray wet deck; they slid, and she did likewise, and Carstairs all but went into the scuppers.

For a moment he held her tightly, felt her presence, felt her body against his; then he drew her into the lee of a lifeboat

and they were laughing together. Yet this fleeting instant of contact had destroyed everything that had gone before, and what had been in their minds and on their lips was quite gone.

Mary Fleming held up her hand, and rubbed her wrist with a grimace.

"Mercy! Do you carry iron bars in your pockets? Something almost broke my wrist."

Carstairs put hand to jacket pocket and produced an automatic. She looked at at, then looked up at him—a queer look, inscrutable, questioning, yet not alarmed.

"Your habitual companion?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Temporarily, yes."

Sparks came out of his cubby, saw them there, and joined them with his usual grin.

"Do you know, Mrs. Fleming," he exclaimed, "that you remind me powerfully of a lady I saw a couple of times back at Vancouver? Yes'm, you do. Look just like her, only she was younger. That was quite a while back, though. Her husband was an engineer and he was putting up a big radio station and I was hanging around lookin' on. Gifford, his name was."

Mary Fleming made a laughing response, but not before Carstairs had caught the sharp rise of fear in her eyes—fear, and the widening of alarm.

Carstairs departed, leaving her with Sparks. He was more astonished than he cared to admit. Then her name was not Fleming at all? But what had she to do with Dubois?

Before that evening was over, he was to be asking even sharper questions of himself.

CHAPTER IV

THE COLONEL'S LADY

THE OFFICERS' cabins were directly under the bridge. Those assigned the few and far between passengers were at the rear of the bridge deck. Dubois, however, had taken a cabin adjoining that of Carstairs, leaving Mary Fleming, with a certain delicacy, to occupy the block aft herself.

After mess Carstairs went to his room for tobacco. He did not switch on the light but reached in for his pouch, then stood in his cabin an instant, bracing himself against the roll of the ship, as he filled his pipe. The door of Dubois' cabin opened and Yim Li came out with a tray. The voice of Dubois checked him, and he made answer.

"Very well. In an hour or two it will be managed, master."

Yim Li went his way. Carstairs thoughtfully sought the saloon again. He knew now what the steward had meant. Yim Li spoke the dialect of the Straits Chinese, and not the dialect of Yunnan at all. And what did the pock marked yellow man intend to manage?

The saloon cabin was impossible. The skipper was there with Mr. Conway, the second officer having the deck. Sparks was there, with the second engineer; and Mary Fleming was there, but it was all a matter of politeness. The *Voordam* was rolling in a diabolical fashion; it was impossible to obtain any comfort in a chair, and when Mrs. Fleming dismissed her circle there was vast relief. As Mr. Freeman observed to Carstairs, it was up to the officers to entertain a lady but right now it was a hell of a job.

Sparks took Mary Fleming on deck, but Carstairs came along and dismissed him, making no bones about it, then conducted the passenger to the lee passage. A gust of misty rain was sweeping the weather side of the ship.

"You are not polite," she said abruptly.

For the first time Carstairs caught the real quality of her voice, its natural timbre. He liked the full throated sound of it, a hint of contralto, a hint of reserve, a hint of cool ability underneath it all.

"On the contrary," he returned, getting his pipe alight, "I am very polite, with you. Not with the woman you pretend to be. I detest frothy people, and you're anything but that when one gets to the real person."

"I'm tempted to be really angry with

you," she said calmly. "You're impertinent."

"Then I apologize," and Carstairs, leaning on the rail, looked out at the black sea. "Each time I see you, two words come into my mind. Many of us fool ourselves, naturally, about people we scarcely know; yet sometimes we know comparative strangers much better than old friends."

"Sometimes," she agreed. "What are the two words?"

"You'll think them very impertinent, no doubt," said Carstairs. "Yet that depends on the way they're meant, on the spirit in which they're said, on what's behind them. Eh?"

"Of course. What are they?"

"*Ave Maria,*" said Carstairs, and turned to meet her gaze under the overhead light. She was looking at him reflectively, serious for once. He smiled. "I thought of that when I met you in Singapore. Is the confession too revealing?"

"It's not very comprehensible," she said quietly. "I'm not easily fooled; my mirror tells me the truth. Therefore, why should you say such things seriously?"

"Mirrors don't reflect personalities; they only reflect exteriors," said Carstairs. "If I wanted to be impertinent, there are questions I might ask you. But I don't. You're too far above the level of the pack to be brought down to a plane of frivolity, of flirtation, of gay froth—"

"Thank you," she said, as he paused. "Ask one of your impertinent questions, please."

"Very well. Was your husband an engineer?"

To his astonishment, she nodded and replied simply:

"Yes. You heard his name spoken this afternoon. He was killed two years ago by an accident—this was in Burma, where he was working on a railroad project. I was in Vancouver at the time. He went on a hunting trip and his gun exploded. He was after tiger, in company with a French gentleman—an army man on leave, Colonel De Bercy. They sent me back a snapshot taken of him with De Bercy. Perhaps you'd like to see it?"

Somehow, in some mysterious and indefinable way, Carstairs felt a thrill at these words. Some electrical current caught at him, a warning that he was on the threshold of something more than appeared on the surface. This sixth sense fairly jerked at him. Yet there was nothing in her look, in her cool voice, to intimate anything unusual.

"Yes, very much," he replied.

"I'll go to my cabin and get it," she said, and was gone.

WHAT did she mean? Carstairs stood at the rail, staring out at the black sea, still feeling that curious warning thrill. Was it a mere confidence on her part? Why was she confessing that her name was assumed? What lay behind it all?

From these thoughts Carstairs was abruptly jerked by a wild, frantic scream almost at his ear, a scream that tore through him, that brought him around to glimpse something falling out past him, something from the deck above. A cry broke from the bridge, then another—a long wail in the shrill Malay voices.

Forgetting everything else, Carstairs darted to the port ladder and scrambled up to the bridge. As he reached it, the pulsation of the engines ceased. He saw the helmsman dart out to the rail, tear loose the lifebuoy there and fling it. An instant later the flare broke forth on the water and went bobbing astern.

Captain Freeman was up next moment, and amid a bawl of voices Carstairs made out that the second officer had left the chart house for some reason and had fallen overboard. The two men inside had heard him scream. So, for that matter, had Carstairs, and had even seen him falling. How he had gone overboard was a mystery, unless a roll of the ship had sent him over. Perhaps he had been inspecting the lashings of the lifeboats.

The *Voordam* was brought around and circled back to the bobbing flare, all hands lining the rail excitedly. The searchlight was broken out, but no boat was lowered.

The seas were too high, except in case of necessity. For an hour the angry face of the waters was searched without result. The lifebuoy bobbed empty. The second officer was gone.

"Well, sir, why in hell would he smash my outfit before he done it?" cried out Sparks, presently coming up to the group on the bridge. "Smashed hell out of it!"

"Your what? Who done it?" snapped the skipper.

"Well, I dunno who done it, but it's done," said Sparks excitedly. "Looks like some one went through the sending outfit with an ax—knew his business, he did. That there layout is only junk now, sir. Come and see for yourself."

THEY did come and see, all of them. They saw that, sometime between dinner and now, the wireless apparatus had been very thoroughly smashed to pieces. Having seen this, Carstairs left the upper deck, thoughtfully enough. Was this what Yim Li had undertaken to "manage"? Had he put the *Voordam* out of communication? Had the second officer caught him at it and been sent overboard as a result? Possibly. In fact, very probably . . .

Abruptly, he came upon Mary Fleming standing at the rail. He had forgotten her completely in the rush of events above, and now remembered of a sudden. She turned to him quickly.

"Is it true that some one fell overboard?"

"Yes." Carstairs' tone was dry. "It appears that the second officer went out of his head, smashed up the wireless outfit, and jumped overboard. Odd actions, eh?"

She stared hard at him.

"What does it mean?"

Carstairs shrugged.

"It means that this is no ship for a woman like you to be aboard," he said, then looked at an approaching figure behind her. It was Yim Li. Carstairs spoke to him in French.

"What were you doing on the bridge deck a while ago?"

"I? Nothing, monsieur." The impassive eyes of the yellow man swept him stolidly. "I have been below all evening."

Carstairs looked at him, and laughed, then spoke in Straits Chinese, so that Yim Li's eyes leaped wide in amazement.

"You lie, son of a turtle! You did the job you promised to do, eh? Go on your way, and there will be a reckoning later."

Yim Li passed on without reply, and Carstairs knew that he had made a dreadful and impulsive mistake in uttering this speech; but it was said. Anger had gripped him, and for once he had lost his head. Perhaps the presence of the woman beside him had done this, or it might have been the pool black eyes of Yim Li spurring him.

"You suspect that man of something?" It was the voice of Mary Fleming, low, controlled, rich.

Carstairs swung around, got out a cigaret, and lighted it.

"Yes, but I have nothing to back up my suspicion. I have made a mistake. Pardon me for having left you so long here."

"Don't be conventional." She laughed shortly. "I'm a widow, you know. I must settle down in the little world of widows, who are never conventional, always frothy."

"Lord!" said Carstairs, staring at her, touched by the half bitterness of her voice. "Mary, you'll never be a widow. Since the first time I saw you, I've thought of you as something shining, shining—that's the word that has come into my mind. I don't mean any disrespect."

"I know it," she said, as he paused. "I know it, of course. But I brought that picture and waited for you. I knew you'd want to see it."

"Oh! By all means," he returned. "Will it explain why you're Mrs. Fleming?"

"Why I took my maiden name for my passport? Yes. It will explain why I've been traveling around so aimlessly, why I have the air of frothy frivolity which you don't like, why I'm aboard this ship.

Here's the snapshot of my husband and Colonel De Bercy."

Carstairs took the Kodak picture she handed him, and turned to hold it to the light of the electric bulb. He frowned, looked harder at it, incredulous. He saw a smiling American—and beside him, smiling also, the Frenchman in question.

This Frenchman was M. Dubois.

Carstairs swung around, questions on his lips. Then he found himself alone. In that instant, Mrs. Fleming had slipped away, was gone. Carstairs looked again at the picture, and a soft whistle broke from his lips.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated softly. "So that's it. What does she mean by it? Has she been hunting him all over this part of the world, hunting this man? And now she's found him, what is she going to do? Well, this pins something on Dubois, all right, gives me the first tangible clue to the rascal. Did he murder her husband, then? Blessed if I know—but—"

A hundred things tugging at his brain, he turned to the companionway. As he reached it, still holding the picture in his hand, he laughed softly.

"I knew there was something back of it all—a woman to live with day in and day out, eh?" he muttered. "Yes, she's that kind. Nothing sexy about her, but something better—and rarer. Fine gold, shining, shining! That's the word for her . . ."

He came to his cabin, pushed the door open, reached for the electric switch.

That was all he remembered.

CHAPTER V

A NIGHT ON DECK

THAT night there was some electric feeling in the air, something queer and vague and scary that rode the tail of the blow. Everybody said so forward, and the off watch of lascars squatted on the hatch and talked together in their guttural, chirpy Malay, firemen and crew together. The serang, who acted as boatswain, sat in the middle of the circle and told horrible ghost stories. They did not break up until the watches changed and Mr. Conway took over the bridge from the skipper.

The serang went to the bridge. Mr. Conway, after lighting his pipe and glancing at the chart and binnacle, stepped outside to enjoy his smoke in the open. The serang came and stood beside the helmsman, chewing his betel paste, and presently spoke—

"*Salatan-daya?*" he asked, frowning a little.

The man at the steam gear nodded.

"Aye, my father, south-southwest."

The serang wrinkled up his nose and sniffed the air, which made him look all the more like a dog. It happened that the stars were still cloaked from sight. The *Voordam* was heading dead into the wind's eye.

"I smell, by Allah!" said the serang. "*Karang* and *lumpar.*"

"Coral and mud? Great is thy nose, father of many!" jested the other lascar. "Can ye smell the *kahasi* awaiting thee under the thatch in the river hut?"

"I talk of things that matter, not of women," said the serang. "By the Prophet—may his name be exalted!—I think we are off our course." He glanced into the little lighted well of the binnacle. "Right enough. Yet I could swear that this is the east wind that blows off the islands, and that we are heading into the east."

"Swear a bellyful," said the placid helmsman. "I steer and swear not."

The serang cursed in perplexity. Just then Tock, the steward, came up and told Mr. Conway that the captain wished he would step down to the cabin for a moment. The mate liked to bluster and show off before the others.

"What for?" he demanded with profane and obscene objections. "Don't he know I can't leave the bridge night like this? Serang! Keep your eye peeled until I get topside again."

Mr. Conway, like many another, was given to the soothing and practically

harmless vice of opium. He slipped a pill under his tongue, and a good thing he did; he had need of all the sedative his nerves would take when he got down to the skipper's cabin and pushed open the door, since his knock remained unanswered. Captain Freeman was sitting in the chair before his desk; that is to say, the piece of clay that had been Freeman was there, but Freeman himself was far and away from there. A bullet had gone in at his ear and had come out above his eyes, and it had not come alone.

When Mr. Conway had impatiently turned the skipper a little around, and had seen what there was to see, he became in the full sense of the word a sick man, a very sick man. He had seen a lot in his day, but the shock of this was a bit too much for him, taking it by and large. When he was able to speak, he reverted to his boyhood days and crossed himself.

"Holy saints!" he gasped out, and signed himself again.

His foot struck against something hard, and he groped for it. He stared at the thing he picked up, a long barreled revolver fitted with a silencer.

Then, all of a sudden, he became aware that he was no longer alone in the cabin, and he swung around with a frightened look in his weak face. There in the doorway stood the passenger, Dubois, with Tock peering in past him, slack jawed and wide eyed. Dubois was not over his own sickness by a good deal; he was unsteady on his feet, and his face was blue white, but his gaze was hard and piercing enough. An automatic was in his hand, covering the mate.

"You see, Tock!" he said in English. "You see for yourself, do you? Go away and say nothing about this. I'll talk with Mr. Conway. Be ready when I call you."

Meek little Tock obeyed, pattering away, while Dubois came in and shut the door, his eyes and his automatic never leaving the mate.

"Holy Mother!" slobbered out Mr. Conway suddenly, getting the full idea. "You fool, I didn't do it—I tell you I didn't do it—"

"That's enough out of you," said Dubois calmly. "Listen to me, now. Here you are with the gun in your hand, and blood on your hand to boot. We've seen you. Don't talk, now—you'd better listen to me, Mister, and listen closely! Lay down that gun, you murderer!"

Mr. Conway obeyed quickly, and swallowed hard, so that his prominent Adam's apple bobbed two or three times. Dubois came closer to him and spoke in a lower, more deadly voice.

"You're done, Mister, done, you understand? I can put a bullet into you, aye, and I'll do it if you give me one chance. But I like you. I'll save your life if you want. I'll keep quiet about this, and you can shut the steward's mouth yourself. Understand? Here's your choice—here, man, here! Between my right hand and my left. Make your choice."

THERE was nothing charming about Monsieur Dubois at this moment. His voice and his eyes were cold, merciless, terrible; his livid face was streaming with the sweat of his sickness, but the willpower behind those eyes was enough to freeze a better man than Mr. Conway.

Mr. Conway froze. There was nothing strong about him. His loose mouth quavered; for a moment he did not perceive, in his fright, the choice being offered him. He saw only that Dubois and Tock had him cold, dead to rights, beyond any escape or explanation.

Then, abruptly, he saw what was in the free hand of Dubois. It was a spanking new, bright lavender, Bank of France note for one thousand francs. His distended eyes narrowed on it, and he shot a sudden glance to the face of Dubois, who laughed harshly.

"This and nine more like it—in your pocket. Yes or no? Right hand or left?"

Mr. Conway put down his half raised hands. He licked his tremulous lips, and slowly put forth his right hand to take the banknote. Greed flickered in his eyes.

"Gimme it," he said thickly. "You win. What you want?"

"Obedience," said Dubois. "You become captain of this ship, and you're taking my orders. Agreed?"

"My gosh, yes!" cried out Mr. Conway in huge and awful relief. He fairly grabbed the banknote and pocketed it. "But, but what about this? Who done it?"

"So far as I know," said Dubois, "you did. So far as the steward knows, you did. I leave the steward to you, Mister. Shut him up. That's my first order to you. Savvy? Then I'll cover you up on this."

Red surged up into the sallow features of the mate.

"By the Lord, I'll do that quick enough!" he swore. "And then—"

"Take the deck," said Dubois. "Behind the binnacle you'll find a bar of magnetized iron. Chuck it overboard and trim your course for the Brothers. Understand?"

Conway's jaw fell, but he gulped quick assent. Dubois gestured to the door, and the mate hurriedly departed, almost in a daze.

Left alone, Dubois staggered, drooped against the wall, pocketed his weapon with fumbling fingers. His chin fell on his breast; the strength seemed to go out of him, and his eyes closed. The door silently swung open, and his man Yim Li stepped into the room and caught his arm. Dubois shook him off, head swaying but eyes alight once more.

"All right," he said in French. "I'm all right, Li. Need sleep. Weak. Watch the mate. If he attends to the steward you can trust him. If not, kill him before dawn."

"Very well, master," said Yim Li stolidly. "If you are ready, I can send word to Ali, and we can manage everything ourselves. Now."

"No!" exclaimed Dubois. "Not now. No need. Lock this door. Watch the mate. If he obeys, we can trust him."

"As the mongoose trusts the cobra?" said Yim Li. A thin smile broke on the face of Dubois.

"Exactly. Until we choose to strike him. Now, help me. Thank heaven the sea has gone down. I was never sick like this before."

The pock marked yellow man helped Dubois down the passage to his cabin. Without turning on the light, Dubois dropped on the lower berth, stretched out, and was silent.

YIM LI went back into the captain's cabin and picked up the silenced revolver. He looked it over, nodded, and replaced the empty cartridge with another from his pocket; then he put the weapon away, glanced around, turned out the light, and locked the door from the outside. This had taken a little time. He started up the port ladder for the bridge, and halfway up he came to a sharp halt. From above, he caught a startled cry in Chinese—a thin, pitiful little cry of fear and terror, and felt rather than heard the thudding of booted feet on the deck above.

He came up to the bridge and found only the serang and the helmsman there.

"Where is the mate?" he asked in Malay.

The serang jerked his head toward the outer air, vaguely. A moment later Mr. Conway appeared, looking rather white and rumpled. Yim Li regarded him impassively, then glanced at the binnacle.

"What you doin' up here?" snapped Mr. Conway.

"Look-see Tock," said Yim Li.

Mr. Conway jerked his head, looked at the tray which the steward had left for him on the chart table, and flew into a passion.

"Gone below. Get to hell out o' here, you damned yeller scum; you ain't allowed on the bridge and you know it. Get out!"

Yim Li calmly departed.

He spent an hour roving about the ship like a silent saffron ghost, moving, moving, never staying in one spot. Presently he was in the forecastle, where the off watch was asleep. He touched one of the sleepers, a thin chested Malay, and came back to the deck. In a moment the lascar joined him there. The *Voordam* was

gently pitching into the west wind and the long rolling seas, and across the horizon stars were glittering. The morning would come clear and fine.

"In the name of Allah the Compassionate," said the lascar sleepily. "It is time?"

"No," replied Yim Li. "We are to do nothing. Everything has been done, and now the rest will be done for us. When you have put the stuff in the engines, our work is done."

"May Jehannum take me if I understand," muttered the lascar.

"It is not necessary," said Yim Li. "You will see. Tomorrow many things will happen. The men will be afraid. You must talk to them of evil spirits, so that tomorrow night when the engines stop they will all come down here to be safe. Then it will be simple."

"Nothing is simple with that chief engineer," said Ali. "There is a demon in him."

"He will not be there to trouble you," said Yim Li placidly.

"By Allah, that is good, and better than good!" declared the lascar. A few words more and he departed again to his place, and Yim Li was seen no more about the deck.

MARY FLEMING'S cabin was the after cabin on the starboard side, overlooking the after well deck. Something wakened her that morning very early, before dawn—an odd thudding crunch, as if something heavy had struck the ship's side and broken. Presently she rose and put on some clothes and went out on deck.

She saw no one, not even a man on watch in the bows. The ship was churning along, the sea had gone down, stars were glinting on the sky. She went up at the bridge deck and saw a light in the wireless house. The door was gently swinging and banging, unfastened. She looked in, but no one was there. Tools were spread about, as if Sparks had been at work trying to repair his outfit. So, perhaps, he had. Mary Fleming looked up to the bridge, but did not go up. Instead, she went below again to the deck passage and so to her own cabin.

Outside the cabin, she halted, perplexed. Something had struck the rail of piping, had struck it so hard that the rail was actually bent inward. The "something" could only have come from the bridge or deck above, hurled with terrific force. There was nothing to show what had caused the blow, however. To one side a crumpled cap bearing the insignia of Sparks lay on the deck. It might have lain there for a long time.

She remembered all this in the morning, when she heard that Sparks had vanished.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRISONER

WITH daylight, change of watches, and a warm morning in prospect across a sun glinting sea, Mr. Conway made an observation which no one who knew him well would have denied.

Nobody relieved him, which was singular in the extreme, except for the fact that there was nobody to relieve him. The second officer had slipped his moorings the first night out—centuries ago, it seemed, yet not more than a few hours past. The first night out had just come to an end.

Mr. Conway knew in his own mind where the second officer was, and he was in no doubt about the skipper. He wanted to find Sparks, but did not summon the steward to this end. He sent the serang, who returned with brief word that Sparks was not to be found. Mr. Conway went to do the finding, and had the same luck. Sparks was simply not aboard. So Mr. Conway thought he might as well look up the supercargo and give him the deck, but Carstairs was not to be found either. The officers' cabins were empty, save for that occupied by M. Dubois, and that in which the clay of Captain Freeman still sat at a reddened desk.

It occurred to Mr. Conway, who was by this time feeling somewhat confused,

that he might look up the chief. He descended to the engine room. Mr. MacAlpin was not there, being off watch; the Eurasian second stared blankly at him, and Mr. Conway went up and searched Mr. MacAlpin's cabin. He drew a blank. Out in the passage he was scratching his head and staring around, when he heard Mr. MacAlpin's rich Scotch brogue coming from behind a door, the door of the strong room, adjoining the skipper's cabin.

"Is that you, Mac?" called the mate.

"Who the hell you think it is?" came the muffled reply. "Open the door."

Mr. Conway tried to open it, but the door was massive and well garnished with locks, and all of them were clicked shut, with no keys in sight. Catching a faint sound, Mr. Conway turned around and saw M. Dubois standing in his cabin doorway, smiling grimly. The Frenchman made a gesture, and Mr. Conway, obedient, went to his own cabin and there made the observation as aforesaid.

"Well," he observed, "I'll be damned!"

As for Dubois, he went back into his cabin, closed the door and chuckled softly as he met the gaze of the man who, gagged and bound, was lying in his upper berth.

"Everything is now quite safe, Mr. Carstairs," he said. "You may do all the shouting you wish, if you so desire. Therefore, we may now talk at our ease."

And reaching up, he untied the long silk scarf which was wound about the mouth and chin of his prisoner.

Carstairs did not do any shouting. He had been lying there awake for quite a long time, and judged shrewdly that if shouting would do him any good, he would not have been freed of his gag. There was a bump on the back of his head where he had been hit, but otherwise he was not damaged.

Dubois drew off and regarded him.

"I had a certain affection for you, Carstairs," he said coolly. "I meant to put a neat little sum of money in your pocket and turn you into an assistant; however, Mr. Conway has filled that post excellently. A very fortunate discovery I made last night—it was most kind of you to hold that picture in your hand. We shall talk about it in a moment."

The door opened and Yim Li came in with a breakfast tray. Dubois, who now showed few signs of sickness, rubbed his hands briskly.

"All well, Li?"

"All, master," said the yellow man, and looked at the upper bunk.

Carstairs was not wasting his breath on any useless talk. Ever since the growing daylight showed him, lying on the writing table, the snapshot Mary Fleming had given him, he had realized what was going to happen, and why his life was spared. Also, he had been getting himself into shape to appease the natural and lively curiosity of Dubois about that snapshot.

He knew, with a species of horror, that Dubois must not suspect the truth, must not suspect that Mary Fleming knew him for De Bercy. Whatever Mary Fleming intended, whatever she had planned to do, she was no match for Dubois when it came to physical force; and it would come to this if Dubois suspected the truth.

"You are well, master?" Yim Li turned to Dubois inquiringly. "Shall I help you with this man?"

"No, no, quite useless." Dubois smiled thinly as he glanced at Carstairs. "I'm a trifle shaky, but hungry. Never been seasick before. A devilish bad blow yesterday. Almost knocked me out. No, Li, go ahead and take the steward's place. Poor Tock! I suppose Mr. Conway threw him overboard?"

Yim Li assented.

"A black dog which did not bark," he returned in Straits Chinese slang, signifying that Mr. Conway had hit Tock with a pistol butt.

"Very sad, very sad." Dubois gave Carstairs a glittering look. "Well, we are now about to eat ducks. You understand these things, Mr. Carstairs? Good. To breakfast."

Carstairs understood, well enough; and the fact that Dubois was also acquainted with this slang language showed him all that was necessary to know. "To eat

ducks" meant in plain terms to pirate a ship.

Yim Li departed. Dubois sat down and discussed his meal with growing appetite. From the passage came occasional dull and faint sounds, which amused Dubois.

"Poor MacAlpin does not like his confinement," he observed, sipping his tea. "There is no other opening to the strong room, and he can not break down the door, so he is safe. You may join him presently, if you talk the truth. Otherwise I do not envy you."

"Can't talk—water," mumbled Carstairs. His lips were thick and his mouth dry.

DUBOIS finished his meal, placed the tray aside, and poured water into the mouth of Carstairs, who was lying partly on his side but was able to swallow well enough. Then, having lighted a cigaret, he held it to Carstairs' lips for a puff or two, and finished it himself. He looked sardonically at his captive.

"We treat you well, eh?" said he, with a thin smile. "If there's anything else you want, my dear chap, you have only to ask for it. We may, at least, come to terms."

Carstairs laughed a little.

"You're a cool one, Dubois," he said. "The devil of curiosity is riding you hard, isn't it? You want to know a whole lot of things, and you want mighty bad. About that snapshot, and so forth. Well, you already know or guess enough, thanks to my own folly, to put me out of the way; and if you'll do a little frank talking yourself, I'll promise to come clean."

Dubois nodded and sat on the edge of the writing table, looking up at Carstairs.

"Cool one yourself, young man, he rejoined. "You fooled me in Saigon, and that's saying a good deal. Yes, I'll talk readily enough. No reason why I shouldn't."

"No?" said Carstairs. "You mean to scupper me, do you?"

"Not a bit of it." Dubois grimaced as if in distaste. "There's been too much of that already, thanks to my seasickness. What a beastly nuisance it was. No, I'll lock you in the strong room with Mac and take my departure."

Carstairs had a flash of what lay behind these words. So that was it. Sink the ship and wipe every one out of sight or sound!

"This isn't the first time you've played the game, eh?" he said.

Dubois laughed.

"Hardly, old chap. The inquisition has begun?"

"Not much to it," returned Carstairs. "I'm under no illusions as to your kind intentions, but what worries me is our lady passenger. Where does she stand in your scheme of things?"

The hard, steady gaze of Dubois narrowed through the smoke.

"So your interest is acute there, is it? I suspected as much."

"Don't be a fool," said Carstairs, and the Frenchman laughed softly.

"I'm not a fool, Carstairs. You ought to realize it at the moment. As to the lady, she does not remain with the ship. She goes with me—and she goes willingly. She will become Madame Dubois, you comprehend? That is all arranged between us."

"Which is more or less a lie," said Carstairs pleasantly. "However, let's have one more bit of clearing up. The cargo aboard here is fake, of course?"

"Of course," assented Dubois, who seemed amused by the question. "That satisfies you, does it?" He reached out, flipped up the Kodak picture in his fingers and tapped it. "Well, my dear chap, do you care to explain this to me?"

"Of course," said Carstairs. "You were the last person known to be with Gifford—that is, Colonel De Bercy was the last person. It seemed that investigation disclosed no such person known to the French army list, and Gifford's heirs wanted to find out a little more about the accident which finished him. I got the job."

"Upon my word," said Dubois, looking

a trifle astonished. "Do you mean to say you're a sort of detective—eh?"

"In this case, yes," responded Carstairs. "All I had to go on was that photo, but I got quite a ways on it, as you'll probably admit. Somebody said a man like that had been up at Sabang a while back, and I was drifting around when I got word that some one of your description was at Saigon. So I came along, located you, arranged to get on this ship. My extradition papers would only cover you in British territory, you see."

Dubois looked alarmed, very keen and alert.

"Extradition papers! Look here, d'you mean there's actually a warrant out for me—rather, for De Bercy? And that you've stirred up the police about it, all over this part of the world?"

Carstairs laughed at the way his shot had gone home.

"Well, not exactly," he replied. "There's nothing definite known. I've got everything in shape to issue a warrant. What about Gifford? You killed him, of course?"

For a long moment Dubois stared straight at him, motionless, a deadly glitter in those hard, level eyes. Then the Frenchman drew a long breath.

"*Mon dieu*, of all the nerve!" he exclaimed, and broke into a laugh. "Well, young chap, you might as well have the whole story. I killed him, yes. We had found quite a lot of stones, nearly all rubies. A new field, unsuspected. You comprehend? What do you expect to do about it, if I may ask?"

"Nothing, at present," said Carstairs. "When I get back to Singapore, I'll swear out a warrant—"

Dubois laughed heartily at this.

"And you'll have a devil of a time proving anything, I can promise you. See here—all your talk about being fresh to the country was pure bluff, eh? How do you know so much? Where did you learn Chinese?"

"Picked it up. I've lived around," said Carstairs whimsically. "How long do you expect to keep me trussed up like this? My hands are numb."

"By heaven," said Dubois in French, "they'll be still more numb before I get through with you, my beauty!"

He looked at Carstairs, and the fingers of his hands twitched; into his eyes had come a queer and unholy light. Sudden passionate anger and hatred had flamed in his heart and was breaking out at the surface. This information must have shattered his plans and schemes sadly, to have so upset him.

He suddenly rose, turned to the washstand mirror, straightened his cravat, and went out of the cabin.

Left alone, Carstairs relaxed, felt sweat on his face; it had been a strain, and a stiff one, but he had conquered. Dubois believed him implicitly. Why not, indeed? Unless she gave herself away, Mary Fleming was safe; and she was not the one to give herself away. Carstairs laughed to think how Dubois would face the actual truth.

He did not laugh, however, when he thought of what would happen—later.

CHAPTER VII

PLAGUE

THE *VOORDAM* had altered her course and was standing south when Dubois gained the bridge deck and found Mary Fleming tucking herself into a long Singapore chair with a robe over her feet. The serang and two lascars were stretching the deck awning, for the sun was already hot, and the sea was like green jade.

"Good morning," she said brightly, with the radiant smile that seemed to illumine her whole person. "Did you see the islands off the starboard bow? You can see them from here. The serang says we'll pass close to them."

"Yes, the Pulo Condore group," returned Dubois, drawing up a chair. "We'll not pass close to them, however. We'll pick up the Brothers very soon now—two islets about twenty miles off the coast."

"Why are we changing course so much?" she asked. "When I got up, we were heading west, and now we're sailing south, aren't we?"

Dubois nodded and produced a cheroot.

"So it seems," he rejoined carelessly. "Got off our course during the night, I suppose. This is a slow old tub, all right."

"She seems terribly deserted this morning." Mary Fleming frowned in perplexity. "There was nobody except Mr. Conway down to breakfast, and he looked frightfully sleepy and wouldn't say a word to me. And your man has taken the place of that funny little steward, too. I suppose Captain Freeman's on the bridge?"

Dubois glanced up, then struck a match and lighted his cheroot. After a minute he turned to Mary Fleming and met her gaze with an intent and serious look.

"Mrs. Fleming," he said quietly, there's something which I must tell you—strictly against orders. You are not supposed to know. However, it's folly to keep you in the dark about it. You're no silly schoolgirl, apt to break into hysterics and lose your head; on the contrary, you're a very level headed woman, and I know of no one I'd sooner have beside me in an emergency."

Her blue eyes widened a little.

"Why, thank you for the compliment!" she rejoined. "But tell me the mystery, by all means. I'll promise to behave myself."

Dubois looked at his cheroot, then his eyes swept up to meet her gaze.

"Prepare yourself for a shock then," he said simply. "We have plague aboard."

"Plague?" she repeated, with a slightly startled air.

"Bubonic." Dubois nodded gravely. "Doesn't mean much to you, I expect, but it means a lot to any one who knows these seas. In its virulent form, which we have with us, a man is alive one moment, and an hour later he's dead. Where this accursed ship picked it up, there's no saying; perhaps from some other ship at Saigon, perhaps ashore. It's a mystery. At any rate, we have it. And it took toll last night, Mrs. Fleming."

At his manner, at his voice and look, Mary Fleming had slowly whitened. Perhaps she had heard of bubonic plague ere this.

"Just—just how bad is it?" she asked. "Surely I can be of service, if some one is sick—"

Dubois laughed harshly. This laugh cut short her words, as with a knife. It held a metallic note, a strange ironic edge that fairly drove into her.

"Service!" he said. "Dear lady, here one can give no service, save to the dead. I have conferred with Mr. Conway. Forgive us, but you must go nowhere on board. You are limited to your cabin and to this chair. I will take your tray from the hands of Yim Li, and we eat together here, while the weather holds fair; in your cabin, otherwise. The same rule holds for me. My cabin, and the bridge deck here. You understand?"

As she regarded him anger stirred in her eyes, then a growing and helpless realization of what he was saying.

"But surely it can't be so bad!" she protested. "The captain—"

"Mr. Conway is captain," he cut in, and she shrank as she realized what he meant. "We think the second officer brought it aboard, knew what he had and jumped over. I must be very frank, dear lady. There is no officer left except Mr. Conway. Tock, poor little steward, is gone. We have no doctor. Fortunately the men are not as yet touched. It may break out among them at any moment."

Now horror grew in her face, but she settled to it calmly enough. She knew the worst.

"And—plans?" she said quietly.

"We are going to make the Brothers, a pair of islets ahead that give shelter."

Dubois spoke calmly, and his gaze went to the horizon. On their right, the rugged peak of Condore broke the sky, but he looked ahead to a second purplish break, and pointed.

"There. We shall anchor, and face the

worst. No passing ship will take us aboard. I have already made plans for you. We are afraid lest the men discover the situation and take in panic to the boats. If this happens—"

He shrugged, and the gesture was eloquent. Mary Fleming methodically straightened the rug about her feet and legs as she stared at him.

"You say the officers are gone? And the supercargo, Mr. Carstairs—"

"Was buried before dawn," said Dubois. "It has been a terrible night, I assure you."

HE LOOKED out at the horizon, and thus he did not see the slow pallor that came into her face, the odd way her eyes flinched at his words. Next instant she was herself again, but there was a dazed, hurt something in her voice and eyes, as though the blow had gone very deep into her. Dubois remained tactfully silent, in his air a tacit hint of sympathy. Any one would have been shocked at such information.

If Dubois had stopped there, if he had only trusted to silence, his game was won. But he was, naturally, entirely sure of himself. He had not learned that the greatest power, the least risk, the deepest truth, lies in silence. This was one lesson that the Orient might have taught him, but had not. Dubois liked to elaborate his successes.

"Too bad," he said musingly. "Carstairs was a rather decent sort. It took him suddenly. He was gone in ten minutes. I was at the doorway of his cabin, couldn't go in, you know, and he wanted a picture sent home to his brother. A snapshot of himself and a friend. Too bad! Couldn't be done, of course. His door's locked. The lascars who buried him cleaned out all his things. Conway was a fool to let them touch anything, because it'll spread the contagion, of course. Conway lost his head a bit, I'm afraid."

He should have watched Mary Fleming instead of the sea. It was a very deft touch, this about the snapshot—but unfortunately it was not the right touch for Dubois to add.

For Mary Fleming, after one swift glance, dropped her eyes; she, who ever looked forth so bravely and laughingly, now veiled that bright gaze and color came again in her face. Then she laid aside the rug and came to her feet, before he could take her hand to aid her.

"I think I'll go below for a little while," she said quietly. "Here at noon, you say—not in the mess cabin?"

"Yes, here," said Dubois, with a grave little bow that expressed his sympathy and understanding, as only the French can do these things.

She went away, taking the after ladder from the after end of the bridge deck, and Dubois did not offer to accompany her, but looked after her with sharp eyes.

WHEN she had disappeared, he sat in his chair again and chewed his cheroot, smiling slightly as though at some very pleasant recollection. After a little Yim Li appeared, and Dubois beckoned him and spoke in Chinese.

"The boats are ready?"

"All ready, master," said the pock marked yellow man impassively. "The starboard bow boat, here, is ours."

"Ali is off watch now?"

"Until noon, master."

"Good. Tell him this. Bubonic plague is aboard and has already killed most of the officers. The mate is going to anchor near those islands ahead, and the coast is not much over twenty-five miles to the west. The men have only one chance—to take the boats and gain those islands tonight. They must do it soon after dark, because the mate will smash in the boats later to prevent their escape. Do you understand?"

A thin, ironic smile touched the lips of Yim Li, and was gone.

"I understand, master. Ali will spread this story. I will tell the cook. And I will see to it that they do not take our boat."

"Tell them, also," went on Dubois, "that they must take the mate with them. He will fall asleep after the evening meal —put the stuff in his coffee. The serang will see to this, if he is properly scared, and will take the mate with them."

Yim Li nodded and went his way. Dubois sat and looked again at the sea, again smiling a little; perhaps he visioned panic struck lascars lowering away those boats, desperate to get to shore, to get clear of this plague ship. Although the *Voordam* was in the track of ships between the straits and Saigon, the horizon was clear. The lascars would know, of course, that they could easily reach the mainland, or that ships would take them off soon, if they remained on Pulo Condore.

Presently Dubois rose and strolled over to one of the starboard boats. The cover was lashed fast down, apparently undisturbed. Standing by the boat, he examined it sharply and carefully, moved along it, nodded to himself in a satisfied way. No one else would have seen anything amiss, but Dubois knew what to look for. Gray squares, three of them, bow and stern and amidships; two inch holes, covered over with paper, the paper daubed with dirty gray paint that matched well enough to pass any casual eye. Once in the water, once filled with men, the painted paper would last for a little while before the pressure burst it. Perhaps five minutes, perhaps less.

A little later Dubois went up to the bridge. He was there when Mr. Conway appeared, sleepy eyed, and he nodded to the mate, who stood squinting at the Brothers ahead. They lay three miles apart—a low, barren white rock off to the west, and closer to the ship, a round islet that stood two hundred feet above the sea and was green with brush and trees.

"How long, another hour yet?" asked Dubois. The mate nodded and turned to him curiously.

"What you aim to do, huh?"

"Run between them," said Dubois. "Anchor. By the way, I forgot to give you this."

He passed a sheaf of thousand franc notes to the mate, who gulped hungrily and shoved them into his pocket without counting.

"What's your game?" he demanded. "This is a hell of a v'yage. I don't know how it'll come out, and after what's happened I don't give a damn. I'll likely lose my ticket anyhow. But I'd like to know your game, that's all."

Dubois looked at him and smiled, so that Mr. Conway warmed to him at once.

"I'll tell you that—tomorrow. Better go to half speed. We don't want to get there any too—"

Mr. Conway was hastily summoned to the speaking tube. It appeared that there was something wrong with the engines, and the Eurasian second did not know what it was. Dubois, who knew exactly what it was—emery dust in the bearings, perhaps—looked at the islets and chewed his cheroot until Mr. Conway returned.

"Quarter speed suit you better yet, huh?" said the mate. "We'll anchor about six bells, maybe. Got to do some overhaulin' down below. Say, where's MacAlpin? Still locked up down there?"

Dubois nodded and lowered his voice.

"Bubonic," he said laconically. "Understand now?"

"Holy Mother!" ejaculated Mr. Conway, and turned pasty white. He reached for the little box of opium pills. There was no danger of Mr. Conway going near the chief engineer, not this trip.

CHAPTER VIII

LAND, HO!

CARSTAIRS, lying in the upper berth, was hot and miserable. His hands and feet were dead to all feeling, for the cords were tightly drawn. He was hungry, and not having drunk since morning, he was thirsty. He was drowsing in his misery when he felt the slow thudding of the engines cease altogether, and heard the forward machinery manned, and the metallic rattling of cable. Then the *Voordam* swung around

and heaved gradually, gently, to the sea.

"Anchored," thought Carstairs, in blank amazement. "Where, in the devil's name?"

To this, no answer. After a time Dubois came in, whistling cheerfully, and began to pack up his things. He flung Carstairs a sardonic grin.

"Shore party, young man."

"See here," said Carstairs. "You promised to put me with Mac, you know—"

"Promise is broken," said Dubois. "You stay here and go to hell gracefully."

A grip packed and shut, Dubois went out again. The closed cabin was suffocating. Presently Carstairs fell asleep.

Mary Fleming had lunched on the bridge deck with Dubois. None of the crew came within sight. Mr. Conway, having brought the ship to anchor midway between the islets, followed the advice given him by Dubois and went below, making up lost sleep with the help of little brown pellets.

Their luncheon over, Dubois and Mary Fleming talked. Dubois was an interesting talker, and Mrs. Fleming displayed the proper attention—indeed, she had never been brighter or more vivacious, as if she were trying to dispel the dark cloud that overhung them all. Yim Li came to them, about the middle of the afternoon, and stood silent until Dubois gave him permission to speak.

"I found one, master," he said in Chinese, using slang at that. "A black dog, a very handsome one. It was in her suitcase."

"All right," said Dubois. "File off the firing pin and replace it. Replace everything with care. I will keep her here for another half hour."

As the yellow man departed, Dubois turned to Mary Fleming.

"Things are getting bad," he said gravely. "Li tells me that two of the lascars are sick, and the men are waking up. The second engineer is down, too."

This was true. The Eurasian second, having emptied a bottle of cognac, was down and out, and likely to remain so.

"You expect trouble from the men?" said Mary Fleming. "Surely not! These Malays look so meek and gentle. They are such little men."

"Time will tell," said Dubois. "If they break for the boats I'm not the man to try and check them. I know Malays, dear lady. And if the worst happens, I have one of the boats ready and waiting. With Li and another man, we could make the coast very easily—within a few hours. We may have to do it. You'd trust yourself in my hands?"

"Anywhere!" said Mary Fleming, with her most dazzling smile. "But you'd not leave the ship with all your cargo aboard?"

Dubois shrugged.

"Why not? The cargo is nothing. You are everything."

Mary Fleming parried this, but with difficulty. Dubois was sure of himself now. Everything had broken well for him. With evening, his game was won. And, other things thus settled, he could give more attention to this woman who had fascinated him—and whom he believed he had fascinated. After half an hour he went away in search of something cool to drink.

ALONE, Mary Fleming's gaiety vanished. She went to the break of the bridge, searched the decks; the ship, to all appearance, was empty and deserted. Not a soul was in sight. Her features became sharp with anxiety, with bewilderment. She could not comprehend what was going on, what had happened. Whether or not Dubois had lied—this was the burning question. And Carstairs, oh, surely not Carstairs! There was something queer about it all, yet she had taken warning. She must make Dubois think that she believed him implicitly, would obey him. When Dubois returned, she was sitting in her chair again, looking at the islands, smoking.

Mr. Conway rolled out very late in the afternoon. He found Dubois on the bridge, talking with Yim Li and a lascar. The mate was in a horrible temper, and he was hungry and full

of dreams from the opium he had eaten.

"Bring Mr. Conway a cup of coffee, Li," ordered Dubois.

"And make it strong, damned strong," said Mr. Conway. Lascar and Chinaman departed, and the mate swung on Dubois, his eyes stormy and uneasy, his lips slobbering. "Listen here," he began. "I want to know a few things, savvy? I don't understand the half o' this business. The more I think about it, the worse fuddled I get."

Dubois made an indolent, careless gesture. He was superbly self-confident, for his afternoon had passed off very well indeed, and Yim and Ali had reported that the men were in a blind, mad panic after the fashion of Malays.

"Wait," said Dubois. "Drink your coffee. It'll clear your head a bit. We'll go over the whole thing. Must get to work in the morning."

Mr. Conway mumbled and swore obscene oaths that he had not learned as a boy. Presently Yim Li came with a steaming mug of coffee. Mr. Conway mouthed it, gulped it avidly yet not too fast, for it was hot. When he came to the bottom of the mug, he went to the locker and sat back on the cushion.

"Now let's talk," he said thickly, but Dubois did not reply. He did not need to reply, for Mr. Conway did not repeat the words, but fell into deep snoring.

"We might do worse than let the woman taste of it also," said Yim Li, appearing softly.

"No," said Dubois. "With such a woman, that would be a mistake. It is not needed. Go and knock at her door and tell her that we eat in ten minutes."

Dubois and Mary Fleming ate at the table on the bridge deck, in the sunset glow, while the *Voordam* rocked to a gentle sea and the two islets, each a mile and more distant, beckoned the clump of lascars who stood in the bow and talked of plague ships.

"Dear Lady, you must smoke a cigaret, then go to your cabin and lock the door," said Dubois earnestly, when Yim Li had fetched their coffee. "It will soon be dark. Some of the men are sick. Mr. Conway is sick. Death will strike hard and sharp. Li says the men will break for the boats the moment it is dark. They are mad, wild with fear. Well, let them go. I must see to it that they do not touch the boat I have made ready, that's all. You understand?"

She nodded and assented, but she had plans of her own.

An hour later dark figures slipped along the bridge deck. The serang went to the bridge and found Mr. Conway there, breathing hard, and in terror the lascar plunged away and told his fellows that the mate was dying of the plague.

In the shadow of the starboard bow boat waited Dubois, Yim Li and Ali. They heard the whispering talk, the rustle of canvas cut free and whipped away, the creaking of sheaves and davits. No one came near them. Sharp orders came from the serang; well trained, the men got the three other boats swung out, let go the falls, sent them down to the placid sea.

Then there was a rush. With sudden shrill voices outbreaking, the men went down, lascars and yellow cook and serang. Overside, a swift tide rip had set in, bearing towards the reefs of Little Condore, so that the *Voordam* lay tugging and straining at her cable. Down the falls slipped the thin brown shapes, there was a clatter and knock of oars, and now the last man was gone. Down below, a boat shoved off from starboard, two others were already sweeping out from port, the dipping oars stirring the phosphorescent water in dim fires. The three boats stole away and merged into the darkness, but those odd flitting water flames betrayed whither they were bearing.

Three figures by the starboard bow boat stood at the rail, waiting, listening, watching.

MEANTIME Mary Fleming, having found that the ship's lights were off, donned a dark wrap, slipped something heavy into the pocket and left her cabin. She heard the noise above, and knew that the

men were going. She did not make for the bridge deck, however, but groped her way forward, to the cross passage off which opened the officers' cabins. Here she paused in some perplexity.

"Mr. Carstairs!" she called softly. "Tom Carstairs!"

The sound of her voice, the sound of those words echoing hollowly from emptiness, checked her and frightened her. She had no reason to call Carstairs. He was dead, Dubois had said, dead and buried. Yet she could not believe Dubois, and she called Carstairs. She turned and jumped nervously when from a door at her very side came a queer husky response.

"*Salut,* Marie! That you? Inside, quick!"

"Oh!"

The gasp broke from her, then she tried the door, swung it open on darkness, and leaned against the doorpost, feeling faint.

"Mary! Where are you?" came the voice of Carstairs. "I'm in the top bunk. There's a tray on the desk. Get a knife. What's happened? Where are we?"

She pulled herself together, and began to grope in the darkness.

"Oh, thank God!" she breathed. "We're anchored, near islands. I don't know what's happened. Dubois says it's bubonic plague. I think the men are leaving the ship."

"Bubonic hell!" said Carstairs. "That devil has murdered everybody, like he murdered your husband. He told me about it. To get some rubies they'd found. Can you reach me?"

Sobbing, yet cool enough, she was fumbling at his numbed body with the knife she had found. Carstairs could feel nothing except, for a moment, the soft rose leaf touch of her hand as it came to his face. He kissed her palm with his lips, and her fingers pressed his cheek for an instant in response. He felt his arm moved, but it was a thing of wood.

"There, get down, get down," she exclaimed softly. "Are you hurt? Can't you move?"

"I'll not move for a bit," said Carstairs. "No, I'm not hurt, merely numb. You run out of here, now—go to your cabin, lock the door. It's horribly dangerous here for you. If that devil knew the truth, he'd kill you in a flash. Go on! I'll be along pretty soon."

Mary Fleming would not, at first, but he prevailed urgently upon her, and after a moment she touched his face again with her fingers, and then slipped away and was gone. Carstairs, breathing deeply, sat up in the berth, rubbed his ankles, chafed his hands and wrists; but he was a man of wood in all his extremities, and a low groan broke from him as he realized that he was, momentarily, helpless.

Up on the bridge deck, the three figures by the rail suddenly stirred. The water, halfway to the black mass of Pulo Condore, broke into a flurry of whipped up fires. A long shrill yell rose from the night, followed by an outbreak of shrieks and terror stricken voices. These were checked abruptly, but the water became a radiant mass of quivering and liquid brightness. A burst of frantic cries lifted faintly to the ship.

"*Hai lung,*" said Yim Li, and laughed in his cruel Chinese fashion. The words might mean several things, but Dubois caught their meaning.

"Yes, I saw a couple of shark fins this afternoon," he commented, and struck a match to his cheroot. The faint cries were thin now, gasping, dying out. "Ali, go and switch on the ship's lights, then get that grip out of my cabin and bring it here to our boat. Li, you and I can get off the forward hatch cover and finish the job."

The three separated.

WHEN the ship's lights went on, everything suddenly blazing with electricity, Carstairs abruptly lay down again in his upper bunk. His feet were a blank. He could not feel anything in them. A little

life was coming back into his arms and hands, however, but the hurt of the returning circulation was cruel enough. When the blaze of light in the passage warned him, he resumed his prostrate position and waited, rubbing his wooden hands and fingers.

The door opened, and into the room came a lascar. Relief swept Carstairs. He had expected the yellow man or Dubois. He never dreamed that Dubois had an accomplice in the ranks of the crew. Stirring, he swung his legs over the edge of the bunk, started to speak. A choked gurgle halted him. He looked down to see the lascar gaping up at him, eyes abulge, dismayed terror in that brown dish-face.

Then, quick as the lashing stroke of a snake, the Malay whipped out a knife and lunged upward.

Carstairs, taken wholly by surprise, tried to evade the blow. He did so, but he fell forward awkwardly, off the bunk's edge. Ali was caught under his falling body, tried to drive home another blow with the knife, and cut open the back of Carstairs' hand. Then he went down, flat, with all the weight of Carstairs smashing him against the deck. The wind was knocked out of him; for the moment, he was helpless.

"You'll stay here, my beauty," said Carstairs grimly. With the knife, he ripped off the lascar's dirty sarong, split it, and bound Ali hand and foot. Then, coming to his knees, he looked around the cabin.

Yes, it was there, his own automatic, lying where Dubois had carelessly tossed it. He picked it up, examined it with a grunt of satisfaction, pocketed it. Then he rose, only to topple sidewise against the wall. He could not stand. His feet were as yet almost useless.

Sliding down, sitting against the wall, he took a towel from the washstand and began to tie up his dripping left hand. Thought of Mary Fleming was tugging at him with horrible strength—and he was helpless, until life came into his feet.

CHAPTER IX

VENGEANCE

THE FORE hatch cover was slid aside. Yim Li, who had gone down into the hold, came up the ladder and spoke calmly.

"Everything is right, master. Shall I break it out?"

"Yes," said Dubois. "Break it out. Light the fuse. I'll slip the cable and let her drift. She'll go straight on the reefs and we'll have an easier time putting over the boat if we're with the current."

He went forward. He knew that, even with a hole in her bow, the *Voordam* might not sink easily; ships are made to swim, and whether or not an explosion has torn a ragged piece out of her bottom, no ship goes down readily. But if she is swept upon reefs of sharp living coral, it is only a little while before the sea tears out her plates and knocks her to bits. Safe enough here, too. The Brothers were out of the steamship lane and no one would see her.

When he had knocked out the pin, when he saw the cable slithering and rattling out of the hawse hole, Dubois nimbly avoided the rushing links and hurried aft to where Mary Fleming awaited him in her cabin. When he knocked at the door, the ship already had an easier motion, drifting as she was.

"Who is it?" asked the woman's voice.

"M. Dubois. Come quickly—bring whatever you want!" he rejoined. "We've just discovered that the men set the ship afire before they left. We must go at once!"

Her door opened. He stepped inside and saw her standing there, one hand down at her side, her blue eyes wide and fastened upon him in a way he did not like.

"Your things, dear lady!" he exclaimed. "Come, I will take them—"

"I am not going," she said quietly. Her voice was quiet, cool, restrained, for all the desperation in her eyes. Dubois stiffened a little.

"Not going?" he said, incredulous.

"But you must! There's not a moment to lose."

"I'm not going," she repeated; and added, "With you."

"What do you mean?" he asked, reading sudden sharp warning in the blue eyes so steadily fastened upon him.

"I mean that my name is not Fleming but Gifford," she responded, and there was not a quiver in her voice. "I mean that I have searched a long time to find you. I mean that I know how you killed my husband, how you murdered him for the sake of those rubies, as you have murdered other men aboard this ship. Get out of here before I forget myself!"

Dubois did not move. A mortal pallor swept into his face, and was followed by a rush of blood. But for the moment, her words paralyzed him.

"You—you—you are—he was your husband?" he stammered.

"Yes," she said. "I have warned you. Get out! If you dare to touch me—"

Dubois was galvanized into life. The ship lifted, jerked a little sidewise, rose and fell again. There was a subdued roar, a shock, an explosive shudder that all but flung them to the deck. Then, with a startled oath, Dubois reached out for her.

Mary lifted the revolver, shoved it against him as she shrank, clicked the hammer. No shot sounded.

"Charming little fool!" laughed Dubois, as he picked her up, despite her cry, her frantic struggle, her lashing hands. He had her in his arms, gripping her tight. "So you would shoot me, eh? No, no, dear lady, such a fate is not for me. Come, we shall go, you and I, and we shall reach the Siamese shore and we shall enjoy life together—your husband, eh? Well, so much the better for me."

He laughed again, and carried her out of the cabin.

When he came to the after ladder leading to the bridge deck and shifted her weight, she escaped momentarily from his grip and turned upon him furiously, passionately, fighting him so savagely that the veneer of culture in him was shattered. With an oath Dubois caught her by her thin dress, ripping it asunder, and as she staggered his fist struck her. At this she went limp.

"Hellcat!" panted Dubois. "You'll pay for this!"

He caught up her slim body and mounted the ladder quickly.

The bridge deck was dark, but lights glimmering from up above gave a faint glow. Dubois was surprised and angry when only the figure of Yim Li showed at the starboard bow boat.

"Ali? Where is he?"

"He has not come, master. Shall I seek?"

"Devil take him, no! She's down by the head now. Here, catch hold! Put her in the boat. We'll swing it out."

They ripped the cover from the boat and placed Mary Fleming in the bow, where many things were already piled—water and wine, cabin stores, odds and ends placed there by Yim Li or Ali. The *Voordam* was, true enough, slightly down by the head; half her bow plates had been ripped away by the explosion of that previously prepared bomb, and she was sinking faster than Dubois had anticipated.

"Swing out!" commanded Dubois.

Yim Li slipped the gripes, and next instant the boat was swinging out across the rail. Then Dubois, hearing something, turned his head.

"There's Ali now," he said. "In with you, Ali! Quick, you fool!"

THERE was a laugh. Yim Li uttered a low, incoherent cry, and flung himself sidewise. A pistol vomited flame; in the obscurity here beneath the awning everything was indistinct and vague.

"This is for Gifford, De Bercy!" cried the voice of Carstairs, and the pistol smashed out its deathly vomit again, and again.

Dubois spun around, then darted aside. Neither he nor Yim Li could know that Carstairs had, upon firing, dropped to the deck and was crawling under the swung out boat. Both of them converged on the

dark ventilator where he had been standing a moment earlier, searching the obscurity. Dubois caught a moving shape and leaped in at it, pistol in hand. A knife drove into his shoulder. His pistol spoke, muffled by flesh.

Yim Li screamed—the unearthly, horrible scream of a Chinese which rings in the ears and is not forgotten. The two men were grappled. And, as each of them realized their ghastly error, came the laugh of Carstairs.

Standing by the boat, he fired deliberately, bullet after bullet, fired until the clip in his pistol was empty. The last bullet drove into a crawling shape, twisting toward him across the deck—the shape of Yim Li. It lay still. Dubois had fallen against the ventilator and was gripping at it, his weapon lost.

"Carstairs!" his voice came faintly. "Carstairs—you damned—"

Then he choked, and his head fell forward, and when Carstairs approached, he had gone to meet Captain Freeman in the far spaces. At this instant the *Voordam* lurched, struck heavily, swung around, and with a crunch and a scrape, came to shuddering rest across a reef, listing heavily to port so that the outswung boat swung in again over the rail.

CHAPTER X

A NEW EMPLOYEE

THE *VOORDAM* was immovable, swung neatly across a coral ledge. She would break in two, give her time enough; but not for days yet. And from the bridge, Chief MacAlpin, now released and cursing everything in sight, was making ready the rockets that would fetch in any steamer that might be passing outside the Brothers.

On the bridge deck, beneath the awning, Tom Carstairs felt the fingers of Mary Fleming grip hard at his hand, felt her sit up in her chair with a little gasp.

"It 's all right," he said. "Take it easy, Mary! Nothing more to worry about."

"Dubois!" she exclaimed. "That man—"

"*Requiescat in pace,*" said Carstairs, and laughed a little. "It's more than he deserves."

She leaned back in the chair, drew a long breath. Silence rested upon them. After a little Carstairs lifted her hand and touched his lips to her fingers.

"I've always wanted to do that," he said whimsically. "Lord, what a woman you are, Mary!"

She laughed, but her laugh was shaky.

"Silly. Are all men so silly?" she asked. "You haven't known me a week. You haven't really known me at all—and here you act like a silly boy—"

"In love," he added, as she paused. "Well, why not? I don't need to know you any better, Mary."

"Please don't talk about love," she said, half in desperation.

"Right," said Carstairs quietly, holding to her hand. "Listen, Mary. I'm not talking about love. What I'd like is to be near you always; that's the way I think of you. A person to be near, to be with, to know better all the time. Is that love? I don't know. But I'm going to talk business here and now, if you'll listen."

"Business?" she repeated.

"Just that. I can use you. Mengleberg can use you. Let me tell you something . . ."

He told her about his work, about what he had been doing for Mengleberg here and there in far corners of the seas. From the bridge above the curses of MacAlpin came to them dimly; from below the swirl of waters on the reef lifted through the night with luminous glowings.

"Now," said Carstairs, "I don't want to lose you, Mary. No need for you to go back home. You weren't made for widow's life—not you. Stay in Singapore. You and I can do things. I'll guarantee that Herman Mengleberg will be delighted to take you on—"

"But I don't understand. You seem to be entirely cheerful over it!" she exclaimed. "Here the ship is wrecked—"

"And Herman collects insurance on her," said Carstairs, laughing. "Also, she's not too much wrecked for us to make an examination of a few bales and boxes up forward, which will clear things in great shape. Instead of Dubois sitting beyond the law in Siam while his lawyers collect insurance on fake cargo, he's sitting somewhere else, and there'll be no collecting done. Yes, I may well feel cheerful, except for the poor devils whom Dubois sent to their account. And best of all, I feel cheerful over you, Mary Fleming."

"That's good of you—to take such interest in a stranger," she said, half laughing.

"Right." Carstairs spoke almost crisply. "I'll not talk love. I'll talk partnership! I know how you feel about it. Love's all right in the movies, but when you give yourself to another person, there's a lot more to it. That is, in real life, there would be for a woman like you. Well, suppose we stick together a bit? We'll have work enough. There are things you could handle which I'd never dare try. We'll be good friends, we'll get to know each other; and perhaps you'll come to think of me as I do of you. Perhaps—it's a slim chance, but I wouldn't want you unless you did. What do you say? Yes or no?"

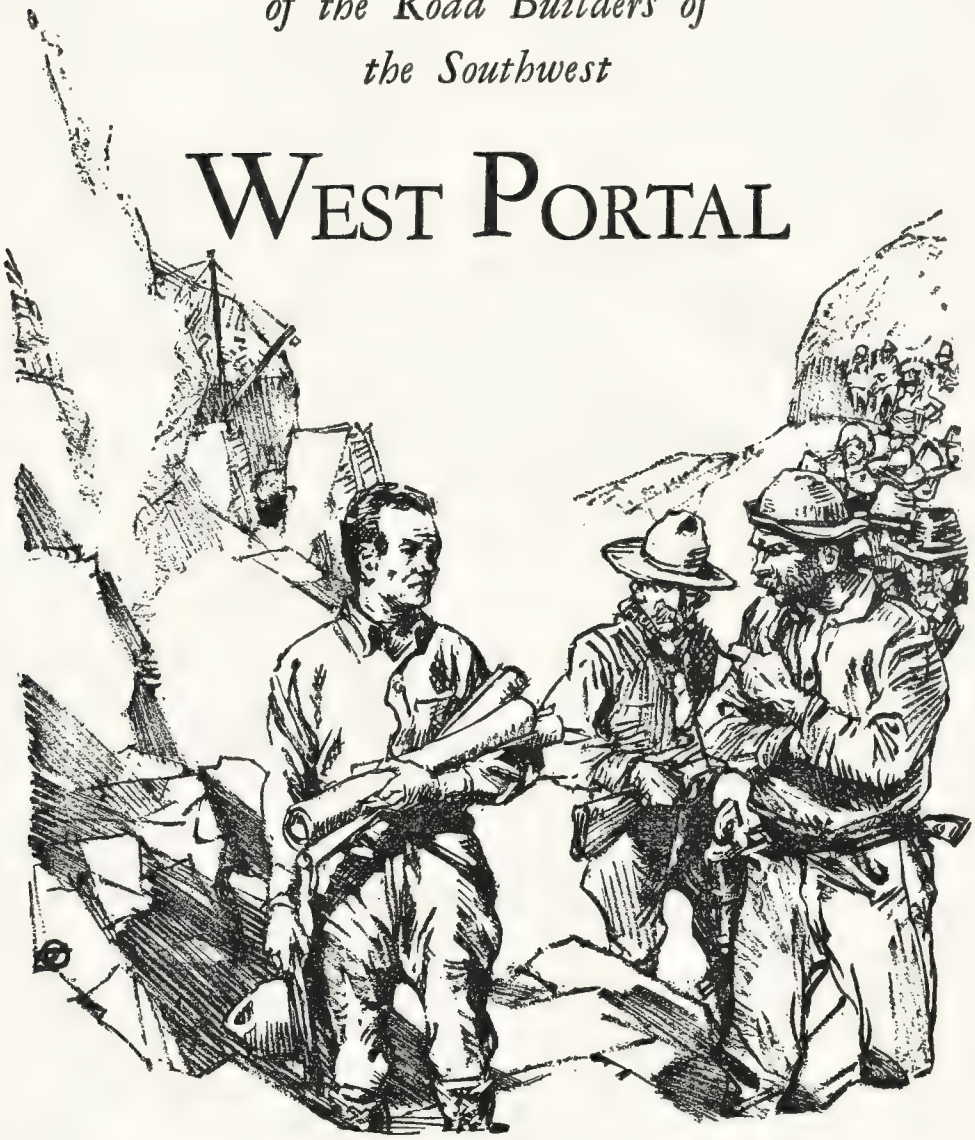
Mac, on the bridge, uttered a loud and triumphant curse. There was the hiss and flaring splutter of a rocket flaring high into the sky. It burst, and in the pale greenish glare Tom Carstairs saw the face of Mary Fleming close to him.

He did not need the quick pressure of her hand to know that Mengleberg, Inc, was about to take on a new employee.

GUTHRIE BROWN

gives us another fine tale of the Road Builders of the Southwest

WEST PORTAL



JOHN BONNER, road contractor, stood in the mouth of the Las Flores irrigation tunnel examining the bridge staging above his head. He was calculating that another day would see him ready for the concrete, when a sudden wind blew cold on his back. He turned swiftly to gaze along the dim gallery behind him. There was no smoke, no smell of powder. What had caused that heavy draft?

Now he heard a sound of running feet, growing rapidly clearer. An undersized boy of eighteen flung himself out of the shadows upon John and clutched him wildly, struggling for speech.

"It—it—" was all he could manage, his breath sobbing up from the bottom of his lungs as he helplessly pounded the great chest before him.

"Don't talk, Taney," commanded John quietly, an arm about the boy. "Just breathe a minute—see—slow and steady. That does it. Not yet! Now."

"Somepin' happened, John! I was tellin' Mr. Jennings what you said, and a wind knocked me down—knocked me flatter 'n a pancake! And when I got up he was gone and I could hear him runnin'—"

Taney Croton stopped. Never, never had he seen his boss look like that.

"Bring all our men with picks and shovels, kid. Tell them to get here the quickest they ever moved in their lives."

A reclamation engineer dropped over the masonry wing of the canal at the tunnel mouth.

"Here are the blueprints, Mr. Bonner—" The engineer stopped as abruptly as the boy. "What the—"

"Cave-in," said John. "Get to the office, man. We must have extra cars and rails. Send somebody to unlock the warehouse. Rout out the other two tunnel crews. They can lay another track to shunt back the empties. My men will do the digging. Move, both of you."

He did not raise his voice, but the two moved, each of them wildly shouting the news as he ran.

John did not need to call his men off the bridge. They had already dropped about him. In two minutes they were cutting dimension stuff into lengths for ties and carrying down rails which were being spiked into place when the wild eyed office force of the Reclamation Service arrived in a body.

"Where is it?" demanded the chief engineer, Talmadge.

"I don't know," answered John, "but I'm afraid it's beyond the air shaft. The wind would have hit me harder if it had been this side."

"Is Jennings caught?"

"No. One of my men was talking with him when it happened. He's in there somewhere."

John's panting road crew slid over the bank of the canal, flung their implements into the little tunnel cars and followed Talmadge on a run down the dimly lighted bore.

It was bad. Eleven men, by roll call, were caught beyond the air shaft. The cave-in had occurred so close to the breast that there seemed every probability that it included the whole heading. But the shovels rose and fell with desperate speed, spurred by the slim hope that some one might be living beyond the grim wall.

It was in the middle of the next afternoon that Talmadge, after once more assuring the superintendent at the east or river portal that they had all the help at the west portal they could possibly use, sat back in his chair and began to realize a number of things. In the first place the chief engineer recalled that he had not given one original order or even made a suggestion in regard to this rescue work. The work was under way within twenty minutes after the accident had happened. Over two thousand feet of parallel track had been laid and was being used on a floor where there had seemed no possible room for another set of rails. Twelve two-hour shifts had been organized and were working with machinelike regularity, utilizing every man who could get shovel room in the ten foot space. The stationary engine which hauled out the loaded cars had not missed a beat in thirty hours. Speed and order and amazing efficiency had materialized out of a situation where Talmadge's long experience had taught him to expect chaos. And these things had been accomplished without fuss or conflict by a road contractor who had not the slightest responsibility for affairs in the tunnel.

Jennings, the tunnel contractor, was useless except to ply a shovel. Talmadge had seen his drawn, white face, and felt a stab of pity through his own horror. This was a hideous thing to happen to a man, when it seemed that he had been using every reasonable care in his work.

The timbering crew had been right at the heels of the drillers—that was the

reason so many men had been caught. The formation was treacherous, every one knew. Talmadge felt suddenly that he ought to say something to Jennings, although he had never particularly liked the man.

HE ARRIVED at the portal to find John standing beside the tunnel contractor, a hand on his shoulder. Jennings was staring down at something that was being carried out past him. Talmadge turned away his eyes and heard John say:

"Go and get some rest. You'll go off center if you keep this up."

"I can't!" Jennings' voice rose hysterically. "I can't sleep! Lord of Peace, I'm going mad!" His huge fists clenched, and the sweat stood out on his face.

John walked him down the bed of the canal. Talmadge followed. There was nothing he could do for Jennings, but he was fascinated by the big, quiet man at his side, who was not talking but was in some manner steadying the other.

The engineer had seen little of the road contractor before this. The work of reconstructing the road from the east portal had but lately come in range of the west portal camp. There had been a long consultation in the Government offices before a canal crossing was decided on. Talmadge recalled that Bonner had spoken but once. He had pointed out that, owing to the topography of the country, a bridge across the canal at the tunnel portal was the safest and most logical route. The discussion had continued for three hours and finally Bonner's plan was accepted, with nothing added to it and nothing taken away. Talmadge was remembering that now.

Suddenly a shout and the sound of running feet from the other side of the canal bank sent the three men scrambling up to see what had caused the disturbance. A man was running in their direction, closely pursued by a horseman, one of the deputy sheriffs who was patrolling the strict line that had been thrown about the portal.

John's first act after starting the rescue work was to ask the aid of the sheriff in the county seat of Havill, seven miles away. The precaution had been amply justified. By daylight the morning after the accident, three or four hundred people were on the ground, determined to miss no detail of the proceedings.

Some of them were furious when they found that not only were they not allowed to enter the tunnel, but could not get within three hundred yards of it. For the most part, however, they settled down to wait with more or less good nature. They had brought along picnic lunches. Some of them were accompanied by their families.

John found their ghoulish curiosity a heavy strain on his patience. Relatives he had let inside the lines, but he did not allow them in the tunnel. There was no room there for any one who did not have work to do, not to mention the danger from the constantly moving double line of cars. The Reclamation Service had backed his orders fully.

But the man who was running toward them had evidently broken through the guard, counting on the reluctance of an officer to shoot under such circumstances.

The deputy sheriff collared the man almost at their feet. The captive fought savagely, booting the legs of the horse and cursing the officer in terms that made John's eyes suddenly narrow.

"Let him come up!" he called.

The deputy looked up in surprise, still with a good grip on the collar.

"Turn him loose," said John; and to the man, "Come on up."

The man obeyed, slowly climbing the steep canal bank, while the astonished officer rode back to his patrol.

John's glance swept out over the crowd spread among the hillocks about the camp. It had increased to nearly a thousand persons since morning. Where did they all come from?

"Must have paralyzed industry in Havill," thought John, and found what he was looking for—a group of maybe seventy or eighty men, somewhat apart

from the rest and clearly intent on the climbing man.

John nodded to himself as he turned to meet the puzzled eyes of his two companions. But he had no time for explanations before the newcomer stood on the bank facing them.

HE WAS a monstrous man, standing nearly six and a half feet. His face was broad, with heavy jaw and great ears and eyes set curiously wide. His nose had plainly suffered in combat at some time, and his tremendous hands reached nearly to his knees.

"You're Donlin," said John, and felt rather than saw the start of both Talmadge and Jennings.

"How in hell do you know?" came back the other. "I never saw you before."

John ignored that.

"What do you want?"

"I wanta see what's bein' done in that tunnel. I got a right to see. How do we know whether you—"

"Come on," said John, and turned to go.

Plainly Donlin had not expected such prompt compliance.

"I 'spose you're that damned yellow cur of a Jennings that let this thing happen."

Jennings ripped out an oath that for pure vitriol topped anything the chief engineer had ever heard.

"I'm Jennings, you cursed union leech! What you got to say?"

"You are?" Donlin lurched forward a step, an ugly, sidewise lurch, as suggestive of murder as a naked blade.

"I got this to say. Three o' my men are in that bunch you croaked. Call me all the names you can think up, but the union—yes, the *union*!—will see you get what's comin' to you. You'll go up for the full stretch or somebody'll know why."

Jennings, already half way beside himself with grief and remorse, flung forward. But he found himself facing the wrong man.

"Let me at him!" he ordered savagely.

John spoke in a normal, good tempered tone.

"Now that you two have passed the time of day, Donlin and I will go down in the tunnel. And you—" his eye held Jennings—"will be put to bed by the Reclamation Service."

John smiled at Talmadge and slid down into the canal with a gesture to Donlin to follow.

Donlin, who was not in the habit of obedience to casual strangers, followed, nevertheless, and demanded as they walked along the canal bed—

"Who the devil are you, anyway?"

"Your brother," said John.

It had come to him out of the air, that answer; or maybe out of his own sore heart, aching with the incidents of this day . . . an old woman who had sat moveless and wordless for hours within twenty feet of the portal . . . a young wife who had strained to see something borne feet first from the gloom, and then fallen forward to lie quite still . . . a man who stood at the brink of suicidal despair because he seemed responsible for these things.

John had picked up the girl and carried her in out of the blazing sun. He had stooped for a moment to put a comforting arm about the white haired woman; and a tousled head and two wet eyes had thrust up under his other arm as a small voice whispered—

"Please love me, too!"

The stoic old mother and the shivering little son of a lost man, men and women hanging mute at the portal, sweating men inside putting every beat of their hearts into the hopeless fight, Jennings, and the lowering man at John's heels—brotherhood! Where was there room in this dark hour for the hate that had blazed on the canal bank?

John had heard Donlin described by men who had known and worked with him. He had learned something of the man's history. Black, starved years in the Pennsylvania coal pits; fighting, lawless years in the Montana and Nevada

mines. Donlin had become a union organizer of some skill and had gone south into the mining district surrounding Havill. So successful was he here that every miner in three counties had been out on strike for two months now.

Some of them had gathered in the valley town of Havill, where living was cheaper, and caused so much disorder that an overwrought citizenry had demanded the state militia. The arrival of the soldiers had inevitably intensified the high feeling. The tunnel disaster, John saw, had diverted this feeling without reducing its force or danger.

His answer had silenced Donlin. Each shoved a string of empty cars ahead of him into the breast; and the miner stood silent, watching the work while John lent a hand with the timbering.

HE HAD seen to it that the protecting beams and posts were never more than three feet behind the foremost worker. This kept the earth face nearly perpendicular. Danger was reduced materially but not entirely, as was evidenced by the sudden descent of fresh tons of dirt and rocks through the narrow roof space. John yelled a warning as the descent started and snatched to safety the man nearest him, which happened to be Donlin.

Donlin stood rubbing his wrist with an odd expression on his face and his gaze fixed on John as the latter encouraged the disheartened men. This was the most maddening part of the whole gruesome business. Twice before they had been almost in to the original breast, when a new avalanche was released above them; and hours must be spent in regaining the lost ground.

John was glad Donlin had seen just how serious the problem was. He would understand now what Jennings had been up against.

But when, after two hours, they again stood in the canal, Donlin's face was darker than ever. The head and shoulders of a man he knew had been again buried by the new cave-in.

"If he'd 'a' timbered in there the way you're doin', there wouldn't 'a' been no dead men."

"But I'm not driving a tunnel heading. We're not working under natural conditions now. It's a different proposition altogether. Jennings took every precaution that seemed necessary."

"Yes, 'necessary'!" echoed Donlin savagely. "He's just like the whole blasted employer class! He does what he has to do and no more. What's it to him if eleven men get smothered to death? It ain't his come and get it. Then he jumps down the throat of a union man for tellin' him what he looks like. Murder! It's a nice soft word for what he's done."

John said nothing, and Donlin asked—

"Where'd they get you from, to straighten out their damned muddles for 'em?"

John did not answer. Half of him was out of patience with Donlin's stubborn prejudice; but the other half was in sympathy with his one sided, grim idealism. For idealism it was. No doubt of that. Donlin, once caught in a flooded mine, had kept his head and saved the lives of sixteen men.

He had fought consistently in the cause of the miners for years, working beside them, taking what they took, poor as any of them. His weakness, from John's standpoint, was the failure to see that men were not divided into rigid groups. They were all just men. If they really worked they were after much the same things—improved conditions, better opportunities, more beauty. While John saw the great good of organization, he also recognized its peril. But so far as the working man was concerned, Donlin saw only its good, Jennings only its peril. Between the two types of mind there seemed no compromise.

John wondered briefly if he might not try to put something of this up to Donlin, but a glance at the glowering face convinced him of the futility of speech just now. He held out his hand.

"Come again any time you wish."

Donlin took the hand as he growled—

"You're doin' all right."

He was too absorbed in his own brooding bitterness to read the understanding in the eyes meeting his.

THE CORONER'S jury exonerated Jennings without a dissenting voice. There was much caustic comment on the verdict, charges of framing and bribery, along with the inevitable hard feeling such a situation would breed. One of the newspapers in Havill backed the contractor, and the other attacked him viciously.

Jennings took the latter literally. though John pointed out to him that the two were traditional enemies and whatever one supported the other was bound to assail. But the new lease on his common sense which the jury's decision had given Jennings was destroyed by the hostility of the paper. Every man in both the road and tunnel camps recognized the contractor's increasing ugly moodiness as a danger sign.

Work ceased on the tunnel for a week. The Fourth of July was at hand, and operations would be resumed when the celebration was over.

John was able to get in place most of concrete of the new bridge, and start a crew to grading the road from the west portal to town. He had arranged his various tasks so that he might keep in touch with Jennings. The cessation of the tunnel work had been the worst possible thing for him, and John suggested:

"Get in and shovel gravel to that mixer. Put your back into it and give your head a rest."

Jennings did not want to do it, but John had stood so squarely with him from the first hour that he felt he could not refuse. Three days he helped make concrete, and felt better in spite of himself.

By ten o'clock on the morning of the Fourth, the two camps were deserted except for the cats and the goats. John could not blame Jennings for refusing to go to town. The two tilted their chairs against the wall in the cool tunnel entrance and read until noon, when they went their separate ways to find lunch.

The camps lay on either side of a rocky ridge which followed almost exactly the line of the tunnel beneath it. John was surprised to see smoke coming from the cook shack in his camp. As he approached, a slender figure appeared in the door and greeted him with a wide grin.

"Why, Taney!" exclaimed John. "What are you doing here?"

"Gettin' dinner," answered the boy. "Me and Cram ain't much for cooks, but we done our best."

Crammer Mayo, about the age of Taney but twice as big, loomed behind his confederate, and John studied the two laughing faces.

"What are you two rascals hatching?"

"Well, John," explained Taney, "we didn't care nothin' about all that stuff in Havill, honest we didn't, and we thought that you—that maybe you'd—well, that you'd sorta like to go hunting."

"Hunting? What?"

"Sage hens. There's just oodles of 'em up on that mesa, ain't there, Cram?"

Cram nodded emphatically.

"And we got three .22's all cleaned and loaded, John, and—and wouldn't you like to?"

"You bet," answered John heartily, though he had planned on four good hours of extra sleep for the afternoon. "Hadn't we better ask Jennings?"

The boys' faces fell.

"He's such an awful frost, John!"

"He's in trouble, son."

"Ye—es." Taney's generosity struggled with his dislike. "We'll do any way you say, o' course. This hunt's for you."

When John stepped inside he found three men in the shack, three of Jenning's men. One of them explained quickly to the contractor's astonished expression.

"We wasn't sure you was gonna stay, Mr. Bonner, and it seemed somebody oughta sort of look after Jennings. So we thought we'd hang around and kinda keep an eye on him."

John nodded, hiding his surprise. It was the first evidence he had found of any personal loyalty toward Jennings.

"Good idea. Shan't we send down and have him come up to eat with us?"

"I don't think so," said one of the three bluntly, looking John in the eyes. "He won't like it if he knows we're here. There ain't no use beatin' about the bush, Mr. Bonner. You know as well as us that Jennings is a hard man to get along with. There never was no love lost between him and his crew, but we been sorry for him since this happened."

The six sat down to dinner. John did not like the idea of leaving Jennings for the afternoon. But he hated to disappoint the boys, who had eschewed all the delights of a Fourth of July celebration for this sole chance to go hunting with their boss. Also he knew that the trip would be spoiled for them by Jennings' presence.

He had not made up his mind what course to take when he stepped outside an hour later. He saw Jennings walking back to the portal. The three tunnel men were making a surreptitious return to their own camp. Taney and Cram, clattering the dishes behind him, were arguing as to the best method of carrying home ten or fifteen sage hens apiece.

That question was never decided. John saw a dust cloud down the road, something more than a mile away. He watched it idly for a few minutes, as he stood in the shade of the building. Slowly it forced his attention. It was growing bigger, not merely nearer, but larger and heavier. He began to notice that the cloud was being joined by figures that emerged from the scorched brown hillocks at various points and were absorbed in the moving mass.

JOHN'S whole body tensed suddenly with terrific realization. There was not a suggestion of uncertainty in his mind. He knew the man and he guessed his power. He could imagine the effect of the jury's verdict—a furious resentment in the mind of Donlin and his followers at what they would conceive to be a hideous miscarriage of justice. Indeed John had wondered in the last week why nothing had been heard from the labor leader. He had not forgotten Donlin's threat to Jennings, and the dark brooding of the man's face when he had last seen him.

John's mind was traveling fast. Doubtless the thing had been carefully planned. If Jennings came to town on the Fourth, all right. And if he did not, all right still. The miners had scattered in the hills and met so close to the tunnel that there would be little danger of interference from the town. The job would be done and they would be scattered again before the news could spread.

"Taney!" John called, and his tone brought Taney flying to the door. He put a hand on the boy's shoulder and pointed.

"See that dust, kid? That's a mob coming for Jennings, and we must get him out of camp."

Taney's eyes were big with excitement.

"A mob to kill him, John?"

"Yes. Now you have a tough job, son. Ask him to go hunting with you and make him believe that you really want him. Get him to come right up here if you can, then scoot for the mesa and keep on going. There's one chance in a hundred he won't see the dust, but we'll take it. You'll find him sitting in the portal, I think."

Taney dashed down the road, all his glowing plans forgotten, his happiness complete. His beloved boss had asked his help.

"What can I do?" asked Cram eagerly.

"You can find those three who just left and bring them to the bridge. Keep out of sight unless I give the signal. I haven't much hope that Taney will succeed, but it seemed worth trying. If he doesn't we'll have to do something else."

Cram raced away and John followed Taney, watching the menace that was rolling steadily toward the camp. He came to the bridge in time to hear Jennings say:

"Well, I don't want to go, I tell you. What idiot wants to go chasing out through this heat after a handful of bones and feathers?"

"But Mr. Jennings," pleaded Taney,

and John's heart stirred at the clean honesty with which the boy was playing his part, "it would do you lots of good. And —and I thought maybe you wouldn't like to go to town today, so I stayed, too, and—"

Jennings moved uncomfortably.

"Nice of you, of course, but no sense to it. I don't want—"

John swung down from the bridge.

"I wish you'd go with him, Jennings."

"Why don't you go?"

"I thought I'd stay and look after the camp. Some one ought to, and Taney had planned—"

Jennings' eyes narrowed.

"Why the hell all this sudden concern of the kid for me? What the devil's in the wind here?"

Deception was useless. John had glimpsed four heads at the edge of the bank. He nodded and the men descended into the canal. Jennings rose, his face purpling. He looked at his men and turned upon John with cold accusation. John spoke in a natural, quiet tone.

"Man, there's a crowd coming up the road, and I'm afraid they're after you."

"After *me*?"

John looked him steadily in the eyes, and the tunnel contractor understood.

"That damn' paper started it!" he snarled.

"The thing for you to do—" began John.

"Paper, nothin'!" snapped one of the tunnel men. "I'll gamble my next pay check that fellow Donlin's at the bottom of this."

In Jennings' face the dark blood flowed from chin to brow and his eye lighted with a diabolical gleam.

"Let him come! Time he's swallowed a couple of pills from a sawed off shotgun—"

"Wait one minute, Jennings," commanded John.

The man had already started for the bank. John consulted with his eyes the three tunnel men. They noiselessly shifted position.

Jennings had swung back a step impatiently.

"You can see," John told him, "that you mustn't stay here."

"Think I'm gonna run from that drivelin' son of hell?"

"You'll have to go, man."

Jennings stepped toward the other, his eyes glittering. He was not aware of the three who duplicated his movement.

"Get this, Bonner. You can't give me orders. I'm not afraid of any damned mob that ever—"

John's lids drooped a trifle. Jennings was a powerful man, but all his strength was useless against the concerted attack of the four. The three behind him seized his arms and chin and John caught his legs, ordering—

"Gag, Taney!"

The boy, active as a monkey, whipped out a huge bandanna and had it tightly in place between the victim's jaws almost before he was on the ground. They bound his hands securely behind him with insulated wire, and jerked him to his feet again. He strove to break away and did trip and throw one of his own men.

"SLIP up the bank, Taney, and see where they are."

John helped hold the struggling captive while he waited for the report. Taney slid back in a swirl of gravel.

"Oh, John! 'Most to the warehouse. There's 'bout a thousand of 'em, I guess."

"The deuce," muttered John. "Cram, can you run?"

"You bet!" The tall boy sprang forward.

"Sneak out among the buildings," said John quickly. "Show yourself once or twice, till you're sure you've got them coming. Lead them through the camp—but not too close, son. They mustn't guess you aren't Jennings. Be sure you have a good lead when you take to the hills."

Cram nodded as he climbed the bank. The crowd was still traveling in its own dust, and the boy had no difficulty gaining the buildings.

Two minutes later a wild yell told the

men at the portal that Cram had been sighted. John's heart turned over at that sound. If any harm came to the boy . . . He whirled on Jennings.

"Now you're going out of here!"

They set him at a run down the canal; but before they had gone thirty feet Jennings swerved, set his foot against the wall and pitched backward out of their very hands. Wild with fury, he was up in a flash and running. He was almost to the top of the bank when they caught him.

The three men and Taney were furious; but John, even in the stress of the moment, realized that Jennings was scarcely responsible. He suspected that the man might be in a mood almost to welcome death.

They tried again, but Jennings refused to walk. And carrying a fighting maniac under a broiling sun presented peculiar difficulties.

"It's the tunnel for it," concluded John, mopping his streaming face. "But, boys, it's a trap. If they find out they've been fooled they'll come whooping back and search every foot of the country."

"But, John, we can build a barricade in there of cars, an' I'll get them rifles an' we'll sure make it hot for 'em if they come in after us."

The men had to smile over Taney's enthusiasm at the prospect of a fight.

"I hope it won't come to that," said John, "but I guess it's the only thing to do."

Jennings fought every foot of the return trip, but they had now tied his feet together so he did less damage. They dumped him not too ceremoniously into a car, and one man sat on him while the other two sent the car at a sharp clip up the tunnel.

Taney, exercising all the stealth and elaborate precaution that a liberal working education had given him, wormed his way toward the road camp with a hammering heart. He shivered with delightful horror. Maybe he would be wounded. Maybe he would die saving John—or something. He wriggled faster. He must not leave John alone too long.

John had climbed to the bridge. To his left he caught an occasional glimpse of the chase receding into the hills. He glanced to the right at Taney's serpentine progress, and smiled in sympathy. The boy was taking four times as long as necessary for the journey, but that fitted in with John's plans. He had no intention of letting Taney, or any one else, enter the tunnel.

Presently John was amazed to see Cram drop into the canal below him.

"I sure got 'em goin', John," he said with a wide grin. "I led 'em up that rocky draw 'most a mile, and never put foot to ground. They went slow tryin' to find the track. And then I doubled back over the ridge and you never saw me!" he chortled gleefully. "I hoped I'd get in without you seein' me."

John came down to stand beside the boy. He was glad to have him safe, but he was afraid that his quick return might hasten the climax. Cram, well pleased with himself, was going on:

"I got real close to 'em, 'mong the rocks, when I came back. And they sure was cussin' Jennings. There was an awful big ugly man in the lead—is that Donlin, John? He didn't say nothin' at all, but I was more afraid of him than any of them. And John, I done something I bet you never thought of. I stopped at a house over there that was unlocked and telephoned for the militia, and they'll be here—"

"Good Lord! What in the devil did you do that for?"

The utter dismay of his boss stunned Cram to white faced silence.

John was seldom blind to the difficulty of another, but he forgot the boy completely as he sprang up the bank. Sure enough, a new cloud of dust was moving up the road from Havill, moving fast at the tail of fifty or sixty horsemen.

John's gaze swept back to the hills. A dark mass emerged for a minute around a hummock, and disappeared in a gully. They were coming back, and they were coming on the run.

For an instant John stood still, sick and overwhelmed by the ghastly possibilities of this new development. No chance now

to parley with the miners, not under the guns of the soldiers they detested.

Once again his glance flashed over the two approaching groups in swift calculation.

Taney, hugging the rifles, cried from the opposite bank—

"Is that some more of 'em, John?"

"CRAM," ordered John, "run for your life down to the shovel, and bring back the battery and all the wire you can find loose. Gray said he left it in the cab last night."

The boy flew on the errand, wild to redeem his blunder, though he did not understand what wrong he had done.

"Lay the guns down, Taney. We won't need them. Here's the key to the powder house. You'll have to go like the wind. I'm trusting you, son, to keep your head and your feet. A dozen sticks. I'll get the caps from camp."

The return of Cram was only a minute later than John's, and a distant yell greeted the boy's brief appearance on the canal bank.

Taney nearly wept as they placed the dynamite and strung the firing wire along the bridge.

"But, John, why've we gotta do this?"

"The miners are going to get here before the soldiers do, Taney."

"But why couldn't we just blow in the front of the tunnel?"

"Not sure enough to close it, and no time to drill holes."

"Well, this'll sure as hell close it!" Taney stood up and winked back the tears. He was so proud of that bridge! John had let him work in concrete for the first time and help make the form and point up the abutments, and now . . .

John took position well back from the side of the portal, the battery under his hand.

"Cram," he said, "carry these rifles down the canal beyond the turn and lay them well up on the inside bank. Then try to catch the militia and tell them I said to wait."

John had little hope the soldiers would pay attention to that order from a boy, but it gave Cram something to do. John had begun to realize the boy's distress, and regretted his unguarded speech. He ordered Taney back.

"Please let me stay, John. I can dodge as good as you. We can't see anything from here. Can't I go up on the bridge and look?"

As John hesitated, the boy was gone.

"Mind the wire!"

Taney came flying back.

"They're comin' through the camp. They seen the militia, an' they're movin' quick but awful quiet—act like they think we're puttin' somepin' up on 'em."

"Where are the soldiers?"

"Not to the shovel yet. John, his life ain't worth our bridge!"

"That isn't where the balance of value lies, son. His death isn't worth the price they're ready to pay for it."

This was beyond Taney, and he squatted silent on his heels through the ensuing strained seconds. Those seconds dragged maddeningly. The two could sense moving men out of sight beyond the ridge and under the canal bank. They could not hear a thing.

"We won't shoot unless we have to," John whispered. "The first head you see, yell, 'Fire!' It may stop them. Do you hear the horses yet?"

"No," Taney whispered back, and an instant later, "Fire!" in a blood curdling scream that made his boss jump.

There was silence—five seconds, ten, fifteen seconds—then Donlin's voice in a rising yell of fury:

"The damned liars! Fire nothin'! They're just tryin' to hold us till the militia gets here. Come on, boys! He's hid in the tunnel—"

It was rather too much dynamite. But John had taken no chances on not corking the bore perfectly tight.

THE APPROACHING troop of State militia saw the hurtling débris and heard the roar, and involuntarily drew rein. A white faced boy ran panting under the noses of the foremost horses, crying—

"John said to wait."

"And who in hell's John?" demanded a hard visaged horseman in the lead.

"He's the boss of this whole damned works, if you want to know!" yelled Cram, infuriated by the supercilious smile of the lieutenant.

The officer shrugged a shoulder, uttered a sharp command, and the troop swept forward. Two riders playfully caught Cram up between them and set him behind the saddle of one, where he bounced helplessly. When the horse stopped on the canal bank, the boy slid unnoticed to the ground.

The explosion had astounded and sobered the miners. The realization that they had called a bluff which was no bluff at all, had induced a healthy coolness in their blood and their heads. They swarmed up the bank as the dust cleared, ignoring the soldiers who, a minute or so later, moved up near them and into the canal below them.

Silence spread through the crowd as each individual, following the gaze of others, saw the big man who sat on his heel above the opposite wing of the portal. He and a boy beside him were soberly regarding the havoc at their feet.

Donlin was astonished to see John, who he had supposed was some outsider called in by the Government simply to direct the rescue work. What was he doing here now? On top of the question came a queer reaction, a sense of disappointment that made Donlin's voice harsher than usual.

"I wouldn't 'a' thought it o' *you*, to call for the help of these stinkin' scrimshankers!"

"He didn't." Cram fought his way toward Donlin, flailing the miners aside. "*I* phoned for the militia, an' he give me hell for it!"

"He never!" shrieked Taney, springing to his feet. "John never gives nobody hell. You take that back or I'll—" and Taney started down the bank before John's outstretched hand could catch him.

"He did too." Cram fairly danced with rage and shame and hurt, all badly mixed. "He asked me what the devil I did that for, an' I g-guess that's all the hell anybody ever wants out o' John."

They had to grin, those two hundred men. They could not help it. And John, glancing over the faces opposite him and below him, suddenly felt such an upsurge of understanding for men as he had never known in his life before. In that smile had shown for a moment a basic fellowship. Why was it ever lost? Was there not some way to hold it?

Taney, down in the canal, had forgotten Cram and the rest. He was getting a more comprehensive view of the wreck. Taney was not interested in miners or soldiers or the rights of man. He looked up at his boss.

"Every last damn rock busted!" and the tears rose in his voice in spite of him.

Involuntarily Donlin's body jerked a trifle forward.

"Are you the road contractor?"

John nodded, watching the boy.

"And you blew up your own work?"

There was no need to answer that.

"To save the life of that yellow livered skunk in there?"

John raised his head and looked Donlin between the eyes.

"Partly."

Silence—total, meaningful, vibrant silence. It was as if every man of them sat back, digesting that brief word.

Donlin looked slowly from the wreckage that blocked the tunnel to the soldiers, then at the men with him. Nearly all of them were armed. They might have got Jennings—they probably would have got him—but the hate that had smoldered for weeks in Havill would have burst into flame. The portal would have been a shambles.

Donlin was not the only one who was seeing this. Miner and soldier alike were getting a good look. And the man who had stopped a fresh tunnel horror, who did not use words idly, not even the word *brother* . . .

The labor leader's eyes came back to John. In their somber depths grew some-

thing very like a twinkle. And Donlin's next words gave the crowd the biggest jolt it had got yet.

About six o'clock that evening, the captain of Troop M of the State militia, who had been celebrating intensively, discovered all at once that he did not have any more army than a rabbit. After a half hour's search and frantic inquiry, the captain got his lieutenant on the telephone.

"Keep your shirt on," advised the lieutenant in a totally unmilitary tone. "If you must know what I been doing, I been holding scraper for Donlin. No, I ain't drunk! We about got John's muss cleaned up, and I got blisters on my hands . . . Huh? . . . . Well, when a man saves the lives of maybe twenty, thirty men, and more 'n likely your life, too, you kinda . . . Jennings? Been hearing things, have you? Last I saw of Jennings he and a miner were piling lumber. We saved some of the staging, but everything else . . . Aw, come on out and see for yourself! Get here for supper. We're going to have a barbecue and celebrate right."

A Filipino Cock Fight

By WYMAN SIDNEY SMITH

MORE prevalent than bull fights in the lands of Spain, are cock fights in the Philippines. And, unquestionably, it is the most exciting amusement of those jungle islands since headhunting and civil wars went out of date. In Manila alone, more than a score of cock pits cater to the Filipinos, all of them doing their heaviest business on Sunday afternoons, which is play time in the Philippines. The cock fight has an advantage over other entertainments because it is swift, sure, decisive.

On a side street among the coconut palms and bananas, we found the outer courtyard of the pit, a space about a half block in area, and lined on all sides with stalls where brown skinned women nursed and scolded their children, and sold betel, cigars, sweets, dried beef—awesomely blood dark—fish, and *baluts*, those duck eggs, incubated for thirteen days, boiled hard, and then eaten with relish by those who like unhatched duckling. A huge conical roof of nipa thatch rose beyond the court, covering a structure about a hundred feet in diameter at the base, made of bamboo supports and braces.

Twenty centavos took us through the gate into a foyer, or promenade, along one side of the pit or "wheel". In this promenade were more stalls, selling everything from dried beef to trousers, and here, too, the gamesters and devotees wandered about examining the cocks. One pets his bird and exclaims over the brilliant, silky plumage, another counts the leg scales, another tells of the previous exploits of a veteran. Wagers are laid, loans sought, harsh laughter mingled with cries of delight. From the wheel inside may come a disappointed one, carrying by the feet a wounded or a dead *gallo*.

Nearby is a doctor with his box of bottles and a couple of good luck goddesses inside the cover. All of the medicines for curing wounds are in his box, and if the bird has only one cut, he can easily be sewed up, and when the wound heals, he will be used for breeding stock or return to the wheel as a veteran. For these *gallos* are valuable darlings to the Filipino. The bird has been pampered and petted since chickhood, given rare food, talked about, and at last brought forth to wreck or win the family fortune. They are worth fifty pesos or more, an enor-

mous sum to a Filipino household which buys only rice for food and catches fish in the river or the sea for meat, and gathers fruits and bananas from its back yard.

Really wanting to see and yet not caring to enter the crowd of two thousand who shout and stamp in the wheel, we paid fifty centavos more to be admitted to a balcony which hung over one side of the pit or amphitheatre. At the left was a section of seats occupied by prominent men, rich owners, and at the table sits the judge, gavel in hand, ready to stop and start the fights. Overhead was a great punkah, pulled up and down by a man who sits back and occasionally holds the rope with his toe.

Down in the wheel, men and a few women crowd together, looking toward the raised earth platform where the cocks are brought—excited brown faces everywhere.

Two men came forward with the *gallos* and the betting was vociferous. Money passed about, bills waved.

On each of the cocks is fastened a long, sharp knife about three inches long. Very carefully this has been done in the foyer by a master. He springs the bird's toes, spreads them to give the muscles room, places a little yellow cloth around the leg, then attaches the knife, and winds it about many times with string. Then again he spreads the toes, and the bird is pronounced ready for the fray. He comes into the ring wearing a scabbard on the blade.

Then the wheel becomes silent as the judge makes a motion. The scabbards are taken from the knives, the birds are set down on the earth and steered at each other while they are held by the tail. Then they are picked up and allowed to peck each other, then one's eyes are covered and the other pecks him, and vice versa.

They are ready to begin. The birds are free, the men step back. Beautiful creatures they are, long tailed, glossy, sharp and bright eyed as they observe the glint of the knives.

These two stroll around leisurely for a moment as though casual about it all, one pecks at a trifle in the dirt, and then like a flash they spring together, breast to breast, and wing to wing, the knives moving like lightning. Down they go, up again. One *gallo* flies cleanly above the other and comes down facing his enemy in a whirl. Again they come up breast to breast, like fighters in the ring testing each other. Feathers fly out into the earthen floor. The crowd goes wild, shouting, crying, laughing, cheering. This is a good fight, the last one was rather slow and amateurish.

The *gallos* stop, eye each other hypnotically, their heads moving up and down. Then *biff*, together again. This time one turns down slowly, rolls over, and is dead.

Money changes hands.

Another pair of birds come on to fight. These are younger, inexperienced. They do not jump so high, nor fight so hard. But neither turns tail. To turn tail is to lose the fight. The law decrees that the fight must go on until one bird is killed, so that the respective owners do not carry on the fight outside of the wheel.

Biff—feathers fly. *Biff*—the reddish bird sinks down. His eyes close. The other stumbles away, and he too, sinks, but he has only been badly cut. The judge gives him the decision and his owner carries him off to the doctor.

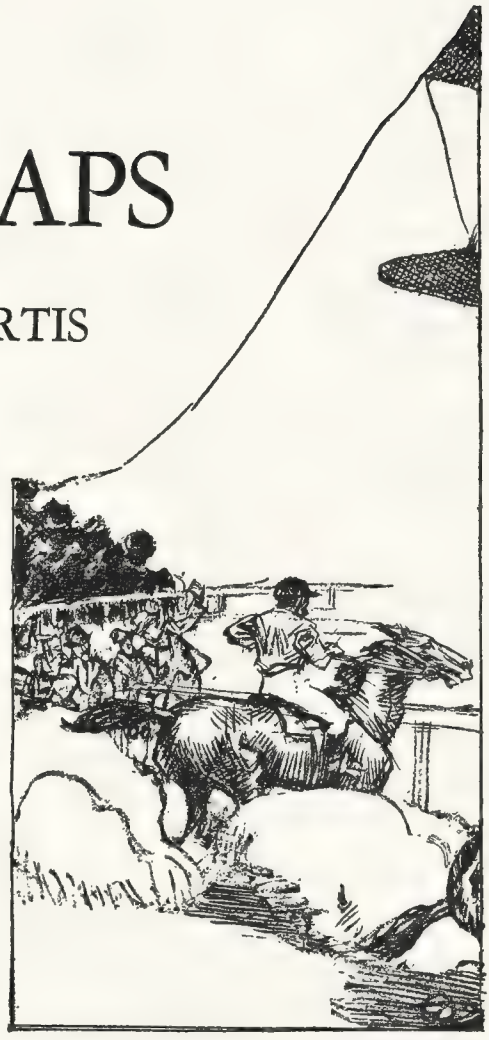
None of the fights last longer than a few minutes—the longest that afternoon was over in less than two minutes—and most of them were finished in a half dozen jumps.

The punkah waves back and forth, the judge pounds the table with his gavel. We step down the stairs and reach the promenade, pause a moment to see the medicine man sewing up a bird, and then out into the hot afternoon sun. In the court the vendors are selling thin slices of their dried meat and bits of magnolia ice. An old woman beggar speaks. She receives the ten centavo piece given her with prayer, crosses herself many times and cries her thanks with grateful eyes.

Part Three

HANDICAPS

By THOMSON BURTIS



A Novel of

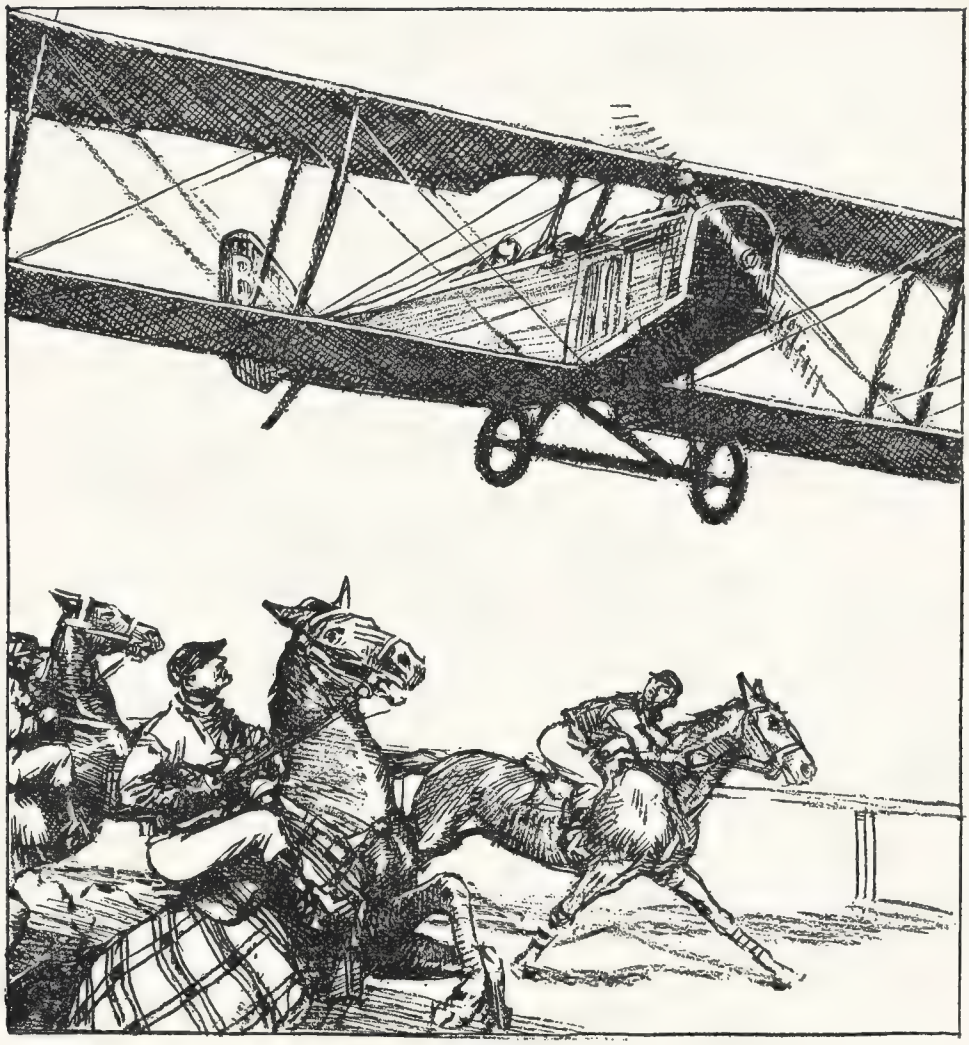
DEEPLY concerned with mysterious attempts to drive them out of the stunt flying game, the Groody Flyers came to Covington, Kentucky, to fill an engagement at the fair. The first day, Reilly, the property man, discovered one of the aerial ladders cut nearly through. Suspicion fell upon Sparrow Cantoni, a pilot in the outfit.

When a letter arrived from Buddy Redfield, co-owner with Slim Evans—a friend of George Groody, Bob Corrigan and Tom Service, partners in the Groody flying enterprise—of Prince Regent, entered in the rich Special to be run at Latonia, offering them a third interest in the horse, they considered it as an opportunity to quit the dangerous business they were engaged in and go to Texas to begin exploiting their property there. Redfield revealed that an enemy, Kin Beaseley, was plotting against Prince Regent, and purchasing a share in a stable; and betting on Prince Regent was therefore extremely chancy business.

One morning while Redfield and Groody were watching the horse work out, it was fired upon from a clump of trees. Two Spot, the colored jockey, was wounded by the bullet. Groody immediately took off in a plane and succeeded in capturing one, Joe Painterfield, who confessed to the shooting, but denied any dealings with Kin Beaseley. He hinted at a machine more powerful than Beaseley, in whose employ he was. Later, Painterfield's bail was mysteriously made and he dropped out of sight.

Suspicion of Sparrow Cantoni seemed justified when he made a slip in the air while Groody was about to change planes. Cantoni, swearing vengeance, quit the flyers and his place was taken by one Delaney, a tramp flyer who had known Groody in France.

Redfield decided to enter Prince Regent in a small race several days before the



the Kentucky Racetracks

Special in order to get a line on his condition. And just before that race, the Groody Flyers were thunderstruck by two happenings.

First, their new pilot, Delaney, was seen going into Kin Beaseley's house; second, Reilly, the property man, disappeared.

"It means," said Tom Service, "that Reilly knew something and they got rid of him because of it."

CHAPTER V

THE SPARROW UNDER SURVEILLANCE

GROODY walked toward the gate leisurely. The race in which Prince Regent was to run was the fifth one on the card, and he was not particularly interested at the moment in the preceding races. He entered the track through the owners' gate

and walked around toward the stables. The third race had just been run, and the sweating horses were being led across the infield from the paddock.

He was walking between two long rows of stables, lounging along with his deliberate, bent kneed stride, when he saw a familiar figure coming toward him.

It was Sparrow Cantoni. Groody removed his cigar and stopped in his tracks. The little Italian was walking rapidly, his eyes blazing defiantly as though daring the older flyer to speak.

"Hello, Sparrow," Groody said calmly. "What are you doing around here?"

"None of your business," snarled Cantoni.

"Listen, Sparrow," Groody said evenly. "I've got something to say to you—"

"And I don't want to hear it," Cantoni snapped. "You and your damned detectives! Think I don't know I'm being followed? Well, you ain't found out anything, have you? And you won't, either—"

"I believe you're right," Groody interrupted. "Listen, Sparrow, I'm damned if I'm not sorry for you; that is, if you're innocent, and I'm not at all sure that you aren't. But you can't blame me or the rest of us for being suspicious. In fact—"

"Is that so?" sneered Cantoni.

"Now don't fly off the handle," Groody told him.

"I'll do whatever I damn' please," Cantoni raved. "I'm going to get even with you, and I'm going to—"

"What?" snapped Groody.

The little Italian was crowding up to him as though spoiling for a fight, and a few stable boys and grooms stopped to watch.

"What?" repeated Cantoni furiously. "You'll soon find out what—"

"That's enough out of you," barked Groody.

His hands shot out and in a second were clutching the arms of the raging Italian.

"Sparrow, get this straight," Groody said evenly. "You'd better be damned careful with those threats. I want to tell you this: You're making a damned fool of yourself if you *are* innocent. We didn't know you, and it was a case of saving my neck. We'd have been damn' fools if we hadn't had you watched; but it didn't mean, and doesn't mean, that we're certain, or that I, to be perfectly honest with you, was absolutely convinced that you set out to murder me. You were a good man for us and we liked you. We just weren't taking any chances. One more word about what you're going to do, though, and I'm going to start to work on you!"

Groody's sloping eyes never left the Italian's and his face was set like granite. For a moment Cantoni stood there, his chest heaving and his face quivering with feeling. Then Groody's eyes widened with amazement. It had seemed that Cantoni could not take his gaze from Groody's. Now he turned his head as if wrenching his eyes away, and in a second they were filled with tears. His face was working uncontrollably.

For an instant Groody could scarcely believe what he saw, then with a sudden movement the young Italian twisted free and turned away, ashamed. He wiped his eyes quickly with his sleeve and stood with his head bowed in despair.

There was a queer constriction in Groody's throat when he tried to speak, and when the words came they were husky.

"What's the matter, young fellow?" he asked gently.

His question caused Cantoni to lose any semblance of control over himself. It was a rare thing in Groody's life to see a man cry, and he shifted uncomfortably, as his eyes, suddenly soft, rested on the heaving shoulders of the little flyer. Impulsively he reached forward and put his hand on Sparrow's shoulder.

"I didn't know you were as sore as that," he said awkwardly. "Anything special on your mind, Sparrow?"

Cantoni whirled around, his jaw trembling.

"It's got my goat," he said, briefly, meeting Groody's gaze and then looking at the ground. "I—I liked you guys, see,

and I liked my job. You kick me out and make me out a bum that was tryin' to knock you off . . ."

"I see," Groody said slowly.

He was studying Cantoni and there was a curious discomfort within him. Suddenly his mind was made up without any conscious process of reasoning. Everything snapped into place.

"Listen, old man," he said, clearing his throat slightly. "I'm damned if I don't believe you, and if it's the truth that you're on the level with us, I'm sorry as hell. How about shaking hands, calling it square and coming back to work?"

Cantoni hesitated; he was unable to speak. The atmosphere was charged with an emotion that was rare in Groody's life. It caused him to feel a queer bewilderment and embarrassment. The adventurer whom life had made hardboiled suddenly realized something which had never occurred to him before. He comprehended perfectly what was going on within the young Italian's mind, and he realized that such a feeling could be aroused by himself. He had laughed at the idea that the tough little outcast might worship him, and that being one of the Groody Flyers might be a cause of profound satisfaction and pride to him, but now he believed it. He felt abject and unworthy and, as he thought of the hours of mental torture which Cantoni must have undergone, if sincere, Groody felt as if he had cruelly hurt a helpless dog which dumbly adored him.

SUDDENLY Cantoni looked up and thrust out his hand. Groody grasped it, and as he did so, Cantoni dropped his eyes shyly and stood silently studying the ground.

"Listen, Sparrow," Groody said. "We'll let bygones be bygones, eh?"

Cantoni nodded.

"As things stand now," Groody went on, "I take it that you'll do anything you can to help us out. Am I right?"

"Hell, yes," Cantoni answered quickly. He looked up again and seemed to have snapped back into his normal self. "Honest, boss, you may not believe it, but I was over here at the track this afternoon to tell you somethin'. Then when I got here and people started to look at me around these barns, and point out who I was, I got sore again and wasn't gonna say a word."

Groody's mind was entirely made up regarding Cantoni, and he had decided to risk confiding in him absolutely. If he was wrong about the sincerity of his employee, the consequences might be serious; but if he was right, Cantoni's assistance could be tremendously important, and he believed he was right.

"I believe you, Sparrow," he said. "And as soon as you spill your dope, I'm going to suggest something to you. What was it you were going to tell me?"

"I got a job with this Thompson outfit, see?" Cantoni began. "When I goes after the job, this fellow, Thompson, that's the head of the outfit, asked me a lot of questions about why I left you, and he figured out what was right—that you fellows suspected me of fixing that ladder, see? He asked me a lot of stuff about you and how I felt towards you, and I tells him that I hates your guts. Then he hires me, and about two hours ago he tells me that I'm supposed to fly low over the track here at around 3:30."

"Well, what of it?"

"Why, the papers here been saying that Prince Regent is such a nervous horse, and a new jockey up on him, and all, that nobody can tell how he can run, see? And I read somewheres that in one of his races down in Louisville—I mean after Redfield got hold of him—that this Evans guy, that's Redfield's partner, flew over the track by accident just when the race was about to start and the Prince runs away—"

"By damn, you're right," snapped Groody. "I remember hearing about that somewhere."

"Sure," Sparrow said eagerly. "And this Thompson guy says that I might get in a little jam 'cause it's against the law to fly over the track while the races are

on, but it wouldn't be anything serious; he'd tend to the fines if there was any."

"You know what it means, don't you?" Groody asked absently.

His mind was casting about like a hound on the scent.

"If you don't, young fellow, I'll let you in on something. We don't intend to bet on the horse today—don't even think he'll win on account of his regular jockey not riding him; but we figured that it would be a good thing to draw the fire of these people who've got it in for Prince Regent today. We got word to Kin Beaseley, and that old son-of-a-gun figures that we believe the horse will win and that we *have* a big chunk on him in the books around the country, and are stalling the public about the horse not winning so the odds'll be bigger. It looks like a cinch to me that Kin Beaseley's the guy that's hiring Thompson to fly over the track and make Prince Regent run away. Beaseley's the only man that's got any idea that we're betting on the horse today—"

"Sure, it must be him," Cantoni interrupted. "I think—"

"Never mind what you think right now," snapped Groody. "You come on with me. If we can pin it on Beaseley, it'll be almost enough to prove he was in on that shooting."

GROODY set off at a pace that forced Cantoni to a half run to keep up with him, and in a few seconds they had reached Prince Regent's barn. A parade of sweating horses that had just finished their race with filing through the gateway from the track, and a column of skittish two year olds was starting across the infield for the paddock.

They found Redfield walking Prince Regent up and down the roadway, starting to warm him up. Groody did not want to get close enough to frighten the horse. Somewhere back in his yearling days, Prince Regent must have been terribly mistreated, for he was afraid of every man in the world, it seemed, except Buddy Redfield and Two Spot Jackson.

The little negro was lolling alongside the barn, playing with Hooch.

"Get up on your feet, midget, and get over there to Prince Regent and do a little work," Groody commanded him. "Tell Buddy to come over here right away."

"Yes, suh." The little negro trotted over to the horse.

Groody started to talk almost before Redfield was within earshot, and two minutes later he, Redfield and Cantoni were on their way across the infield to the offices of Colonel Winfield, the head of the Jockey Club. The colonel was a friend of Redfield's and he wasted no time. He sent his secretary after a policeman and, a moment later, a brawny young officer entered the office.

"Barney, how'd you like a little airplane ride, maybe?" demanded the portly Winfield.

"Swell," grinned the policeman.

He was a square faced, snub nosed young fellow with a bulldog jaw and level blue eyes. He looked as if he could take care of himself under any circumstances and, what was more important to Groody's mind, that he had nerve.

"What's the layout?" he asked.

"I'll tell you on our way out to our field," Groody told him. "The fourth race's next on the card, isn't it, Colonel?"

"Yes," nodded Winfield. "The handicap'll be on in about half an hour."

"All right, we'll see you later," Groody said, as he got to his feet. "Colonel, could you lend us an automobile?"

"Sure thing," the colonel said heartily. "Jim, lead them out to the car and tell Jerry that he's at Lieutenant Groody's disposal until further orders."

"You stay here with Buddy, Sparrow," Groody said. "He may need plenty of help. We'll see you at the boarding house right after the races. See you later, Buddy. Thanks, Colonel Winfield. What's your name, Officer—Barney Sweeney, eh? Well, come on, Sweeney. We may have lots to do."

"I'll fix it up with the captain, Barney,"

Winfield told him as they were going out the door.

A moment later they were in Colonel Winfield's big limousine, bound for the airdrome at a pace which took little account of speed laws.

"Now listen," Groody said. "We've got wind of the fact that an airplane's been hired to fly across the track at the start of the handicap, and we're pretty sure it's for the purpose of scaring Prince Regent."

"I see," nodded the officer. "That's against the law."

"Sure. Now what we're going to do is this: We don't want to stop it before it starts—in fact, the colonel said it would be all right in this special case to let them go through with it. We do want to arrest them as soon as it's done and find out just who the hell's behind it. We think we know, but after we get the pilot and Thompson behind the bars, maybe we can make 'em talk. It's a cinch, almost, that the man behind this is the one that hired Painterfield to shoot Prince Regent."

"That Painterfield bird's pretty tough, seems like," the policeman remarked. "But we can make most guys talk if we have any goods on 'em at all."

Groody nodded.

"That's what I'm in hopes of. Now here's what we're going to do. We're going to go over to the airdrome and get in the air. Then we're going to watch what happens and be right on the tail of this Thompson plane. We'll land at their own airdrome right alongside him so the actual pilot can't get away from us. It may be silly to let them do the stunt like this when we've got straight dope on them, but if we tackle them before anything happens, we've got nothing on them and they'd just laugh at us."

"Sure," agreed the policeman. His eyes were shining in anticipation of a real treat.

Groody was well satisfied that if any unforeseen emergency arose he had a good companion in Officer Barney Sweeney. Had there been time he would have endeavored to have himself sworn in as a special officer and taken Corrigan along with him; but if he had to have the law along, Sweeney bid fair to prove satisfactory.

The car was rolling swiftly down the highway which led past the temporary airdrome of the Groody Flyers, and it was twenty minutes before the scheduled start of the handicap.

"By the way," Groody remarked. "I hear that Painterfield slipped his shadowers. Do you know anything about that?"

The policeman shook his head.

"I HEARD they lost him last night," he said. "But we didn't have no dope except what we've had all along—to keep our eyes open for him and who he's with and where he goes. Of course, we've got detectives on him, too—the chief's all worked up over this mess."

"I should think he would be," Groody grinned as the car rolled into the field. "You don't happen to know whether they've found out who was back of that twenty-five thousand dollar bail, do you?"

Sweeney shook his head.

"We will, though," he said.

Groody got out of the car as Corrigan came to meet them. Sweeney was supplied with a helmet and goggles while Groody explained the situation to Corrigan. The big pilot's eyes were glowing as he listened.

"I'm getting more and more of a hunch," he said, "that if we can get one piece of dope on the higher-ups, that everything will work out just like magic. That's funny about Cantoni, but I think you were right. I sure hope so."

"I didn't have time to talk to him much," Groody said, as he prepared to climb into his ship. "I didn't even tell him that we'd got interested in this Thompson outfit last night. If we can keep Sparrow planted over there . . ."

"We can't do that now," Corrigan pointed out. "He's fallen down on the job scheduled for this afternoon."

Groody nodded.

"I hope this bird Thompson does it himself, now," he said. "All set, Sweeney?"

The policeman nodded. Groody climbed in while Corrigan took a last look at the policeman's belt. As he warmed the motor briefly, he observed that they had only five minutes left. As though his own takeoff was a signal for a general activity, he had scarcely reached a thousand feet when he spotted another airplane rising from the Thompson field, on the banks of the river. He turned and pointed it out to Sweeney. The policeman's eyes were flashing with excitement behind the goggles, and he nodded emphatically.

"He's rarin' to go," Groody reflected with a grin.

He was in hopes the the other pilot would not notice the Hawk, so he circled ever higher over the field. The thronged track was in full view—a line of horses like so many toys were galloping down the stretch toward the starting post. Groody watched them as they lined up at the barrier. He lost sight of the airplane for the moment and it took him a second or two to find it again. It was flying very low, toward the track. His heart bounded exultantly as he saw it sweep over the grandstand and fly directly above the milling horses, which were being aligned at the barrier.

He was sending his own ship toward the track now, flying with his head thrust over the side of the cockpit, and saw plainly what happened.

As the ship flashed across the track, one of the horses shot out of the bunch like a bullet, and tore down the stretch alone. Groody was close enough now to see the jockey's movements as he sawed at the thoroughbred's mouth, but the runaway kept on. It was Prince Regent.

Suddenly Groody's mouth tightened and his face became grimmer as he saw the maddened horse leap the fence and tear through the infield.

"God!" he thought. "Suppose the Prince hurts himself!"

He could not stop to watch what was happening at the track, however. The other plane was flying, not back to the Thompson airdrome, but almost due south. The altimeter in front of Groody read three thousand feet as he circled watchfully, his eyes never leaving the other ship. It was gaining altitude steadily, and with mounting wonder Groody decided that it was bound for the mountains.

"That's funny," he thought. "After all, they couldn't do a hell of a lot to a man for just flying over forbidden territory. He can't be— Yes, I believe he's figuring on getting a long ways away from here until things blow over."

The other ship was about a mile away, still headed south, and about a thousand feet below the Hawk as Groody cut the gun and motioned Sweeney to lean forward.

"He's trying to beat it," Groody yelled. "Here's what we'll do."

He made his suggestions rapidly and the policeman nodded his agreement without a word. It was obvious that Mr. Barney Sweeney was getting the thrill of a lifetime out of his first aerial adventure.

"Thank the Lord I've got a cop along," Groody thought, as he settled back in his seat. "A cops' a cop, afloat or ashore, and I've got a hunch that that bird may not be so easy to stop."

A moment later, as the Hawk, diving at two hundred and twenty miles an hour flashed past the Thompson ship, his hunch became a certainty.

The pilot who looked up at them and waved gaily was Joe Painterfield!

CHAPTER VIII

COMBAT

AS GROODY circled, climbing all the time, he was trying to decide just what Painterfield's presence meant. He cut the gun and bellowed into Sweeney's ear—

"That's Painterfield."

The policeman's mouth dropped and a peculiar glint came into his eyes. He nodded slowly with profound satisfaction.

"Ten to one," Groody thought, as he turned on the motor again, "Painterfield was killing two birds with one stone. Probably decided to skip his bail, or was advised to, and fixed it up to get away by airplane. Well, we'll see what effect the law will have on him."

He was circling back of the slower Thompson ship now, and easing the Hawk up close to it. Sweeney, gun in hand, was standing in the rear cockpit, pointing to his badge as he waved his gun significantly. The policeman was motioning to Painterfield to turn and start back toward Covington, but Painterfield kept steadily on his way, a wide grin on his face.

The Hawk swept past the slower ship and Groody gave it full gun to circle again. When he was a safe distance away from Painterfield's plane, he cut the gun again and yelled to Sweeney:

"We'll probably have to stick it out, but we'll give him one more chance. Remember what I said." Sweeney nodded.

Once more Groody banked around, his eyes scrutinizing the ground. On every side there were low rolling hills, most of them heavily wooded; but small clearings here and there gave hope that in the event of a forced landing, the crash would not be too serious.

As he approached the Jenny he, too, was signaling to Painterfield and patting the cowling of the Hawk meaningly. It was certainly obvious to the fugitive that the Hawk was a much superior ship and that at best Painterfield could not hope to give them the slip.

The ships were about thirty-five hundred feet high when Painterfield suddenly went in a dive. He had been signaled to fly back to Covington, but Groody looked on in amazement as the Jenny started toward the broken terrain below in a steep dive. A second later a possible explanation occurred to him, and instinctively he felt that he had hit upon the truth. Once more he cut off the motor as he leaned back and shouted to the policeman.

"He's going to crack up that crate and escape into the mountains on foot. He doesn't figure that I'd smash up my ship and take a chance . . ."

Sweeney was nodding emphatically as Groody turned to his work again. In a few seconds the Hawk was on the Jenny's tail. Groody's head was thrust over the side of the cockpit and his eyes never left the man he had learned was as ingenious an opponent as any he had ever met.

Painterfield was looking back over his shoulder as the Hawk followed him earthward. With a movement so quick that Groody could scarcely be certain what had happened, the blond outlaw produced a pistol and was pouring shots squarely into the radiator of the Hawk. Like a flash Groody shot upward in a climbing turn, while Sweeney returned the fire from his own pistol.

Groody was cursing steadily as he circled his ship about. He had not dreamed that Painterfield would do what he had done, and it was Groody himself who had given him a made-to-order opportunity to escape. It was almost impossible to hit a plane, to say nothing of its pilot, with a pistol from the air, but he had dived on the same course as Painterfield, going at almost the same speed, and had presented his radiator as a perfect target for even an ordinary shot.

The flyer's narrowed eyes never left the thermometer ahead of him, as he prayed that what he dreaded was not so. But it was. Slowly the centigrade thermometer was crawling up from seventy-eight to eighty, then eight-two, eighty-five . . .

"A bullet or two got the radiator and the water's leaking out of it," Groody thought in despair. "We've got to land pretty quick and that son-of-a-gun can just fly right on."

His mind was abnormally clear for the moment and all the potentialities of the situation seemed to line themselves up in order for his inspection. Somehow, he felt positive that the recapture of Painterfield under these circumstances would provide the clue to the entire situation. And as another thought struck him, the airman's lean face seemed to become

more hawk-like than ever. He resembled a bird of prey as he realized what it might mean to have Painterfield in his power, out here alone, away from civilization.

In an instant his whole spirit seemed to change and for the first time in years, he was for the moment the same Groody who had flung his plane around like a wild man over the battle lines of France. He was carried out of himself by the thought which filled his mind, and all considerations of personal safety were forgotten. As far as he was concerned, his passenger in the back seat did not exist, nor was there anything in all the world except that jeering outlaw in the other ship. He must get Painterfield alive—or dead.

He did not tell Sweeney what had happened, but merely signaled to him as he throttled the motor to twelve hundred revolutions, in order to sustain it as long as possible. Then he began to fly with all the skill that there was in him. Sweeney had his instructions. They were to shoot for Painterfield's propeller, which was of wood and would fly into pieces if a bullet caught it. He was trying to watch the thermometer and the other ship as well, as he brought the Hawk flashing down on a course which would carry it parallel to the Jenny above.

IN A STEEP dive the Hawk swooped across the nose of Painterfield's plane, at a slight angle from the other ship's course. Sweeney was ready, his back to the air blast which made the wires shriek. He had his gun cocked.

Groody cut the motor almost entirely, to cool it. It was only a question of time before all the water would be gone and the motor either freeze, or take fire. He was crouched in his seat, watching Sweeney as the policeman pumped lead toward the propeller of the Jenny. Painterfield must know that the Hawk was disabled; perhaps that had given him a false sense of security, for he did not attempt to maneuver his plane out of the way until Sweeney had had several fair shots at it.

A second later, Groody's plane, traveling at close to two hundred and fifty miles an hour, was so far away that further shooting was ridiculous. Using his great speed to turn the ship before he gave it the gun again, he looked back at the Jenny with a prayer in his heart. It was unanswered, however, for the propeller was undamaged. Sweeney had missed.

Suddenly, however, Painterfield, who was flying level, began to signal wildly. The motor of the Hawk was starting to knock as Groody came toward him again. The fugitive was waving and pointing to the rear of his plane. For the moment Groody was sure that Painterfield was trying to draw him close enough to get another shot, but no sooner had the thought come into his mind than he realized that another shot, more or less, would make no difference. The propeller of the Hawk was of metal and could not be damaged, and a hole or two more in the radiator meant little.

He was tense as he once more drew up on the Jenny. Painterfield had no gun in his hand, and with mounting wonder Groody saw that he was not flying his plane at all. Both hands were in sight, one on the cowling and the other gesturing. Cutting his motor again as the Hawk picked up speed with every foot, Groody scrutinized the Jenny closely.

In a moment he saw what had happened. One of Sweeney's shots had severed the elevator control wires of Painterfield's ship. He could see the cable streaming out in the wind from the little opening on one side of the fuselage, through which it reached the elevator cabin strut. Because of the lucky fact that the ship happened to be so rigged as to fly level, and keep its fore and aft stability at the speed at which the motor chanced to be turning at the moment, the Jenny had not yet gone into the dive which inevitably would come when it hit a bad bump or, at the very latest, when the gas supply was exhausted.

Again Groody circled, yelling the news into Sweeney's ears. His motor was boiling now and it was but a question of min-

utes before the Hawk would have to make a landing. For ten seconds the flyer hesitated. It was not that the certain death of Painterfield was so shocking to contemplate, but the fact that the racetrack man, dead, could do them no good whatever, that caused the rangy airman to make up his mind. He could use those last moments to guide his ship to a place where a safe landing might be made: but the capture of Painterfield meant more than his own safety to him. Somehow, in that moment, it seemed that all that was important in life was bound up in the saving of the helpless outlaw.

To Groody's racing mind, it seemed that Painterfield, alive, made the difference between the success that he craved in life with an ever increasing desire, and failure which would start him out on the old trail again, penniless, with the best part of his life behind him. So it was that he decided to gamble everything, including life itself, upon the rescue of the man who had tried to kill him.

As he eased the sputtering Hawk up alongside the Jenny, the Wright throttled to eleven hundred revolutions and the ship barely staggering through the air, he was aware of the feeling that he wanted to do something for Painterfield, apart from selfish reasons. The young outlaw was as dauntless as ever—almost laughing in the face of death as he threw up his hands hopelessly and shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of defeat.

GROODY leaned over the side of the cockpit and pointed to the specially built wing skid, on the lower wing of his plane. It was larger and hung farther down than the ordinary skid, in order to make it easier for Groody to accomplish his change from one ship to another.

For a moment the two ships flew side by side, as Groody repeatedly gestured toward the center section of his ship, and then pointed to the wing skid. The pilot of the Jenny nodded his comprehension grimly. It was at best a desperate chance, but otherwise he had no chance at all for life, and time was growing short. Groody threw his ship around in a vertical bank as he realized that the Wright had but a few more minutes, perhaps even seconds, before it became a useless lump of metal. At any instant the Jenny might be thrown off keel, too, by the currents which swept up from the hills below. He had scant hope of attaining his objective as he settled down to fly with all the skill the years had given him.

Bit by bit he inched his vibrating plane up to the Jenny once more. Painterfield was climbing carefully from his seat to the top of the center section. Would the slight shift in weight cause the ship to go into a dive? If it did, it would never come out.

Groody had his right wing over the tail of the Jenny, his hand on the throttle which would soon be so useless. He was handling his ship with the infinite delicacy which only instinctive airmanship, plus thousands of hours in the air, can give. His wing was but six or seven feet above the other's fuselage as he eased the throttle forward. Should the Jenny go into a dive now, a collision seemed an absolute certainty, but still he kept on. He saw the tail start to rise slightly. The Jenny was going into a dive—very, very slowly, but still a dive. The tail surfaces crept up toward his right wing as if the Jenny were determined to carry the Hawk to destruction with it. Groody tilted his own plane forward into a dive, following the course of the Jenny as though the two ships were tied together.

His eyes darted from the menacing tail of the Jenny to Painterfield. The young criminal was not even in sight—the lower wing hid him. Slowly the wing crept along the fuselage of the Jenny, and the distance between the two ships never varied as Groody matched inch for inch the course of the uncontrolled plane. He was gaging his flying purely by the difference between his wing and the Jenny, and he was unconscious of the fact that the speed was becoming terrific and that the wires were screaming a devil's song.

Now the rear cockpit, empty, was in

sight. The Jenny's dive became steeper, but always the Hawk stayed with it. His undercarriage must be within inches of the top wing of the lower ship now. Never had he been faced with such a flying problem as now. He could do no more than hold his ship where it was for a moment; but to do that his stick was moving constantly as the Jenny's dive turned into the beginning of a tail spin.

In a second he must zoom up out of danger. Should a bump hit the lower ship, a collision was certain. He could do no more. He could not spin with the Jenny . . .

Suddenly the right wing dropped. Groody shouted exultantly as he pulled back on the stick and saw Painterfield's dangling body swing into his vision.

"Made it!" he yelled.

Would Painterfield be able to climb up on the wing to safety, he wondered? He turned with infinite care. He could not waste a second. He was a full two miles from the only clearing which held out even a chance of safety, so he started banking cautiously, without giving Painterfield an opportunity to climb up on the wing.

No sooner had he headed the ship northward, however, than a familiar face peeped over the edge of the wing and a sinewy hand was grasping the grip at its tip. Just as the motor died and Groody cut the ignition, the lithe young desperado climbed on to the wing, and safety.

For a second Groody removed his eyes from the ground to stare at the helmeted and goggled Painterfield. That indomitable young gentleman was grinning like a Cheshire cat as he lay on the wing and gasped for breath. His eyes shifted to glance below him, and he pointed. Groody looked down just in time to see the Jenny hit the ground. The crash was hidden momentarily by a huge ball of fire, as the gas tank burst, and the next instant the ship was a mass of débris, licked by hungry flames.

Groody was floating his ship downward in a glide so shallow that it was difficult to keep it under control. He took time, however, to look around at his passenger, and his aquiline face broke into a wide grin as he saw Mr. Sweeney mop his forehead, and the gun which he had trained on Painterfield, shake in his hand.

"Some flight for his first one," Groody soliloquized grimly, "and the worst is yet to come."

He settled down to make his landing. He was but twelve hundred feet high, and below him the ground was about as hopeless a looking section of the world as an unfortunate flyer's eyes had ever gazed upon. There was no chance of reaching that one, fairly available field, and Groody was trying to decide between a narrow trail which ran through the deserted countryside, and the possibility of stalling into a particularly thick clump of low trees and undergrowth.

THEN he caught sight of a small cleared slope barely seventy-five yards long and possibly a hundred feet wide. On its crest it was guarded by trees, and at the bottom of the slope there was a small stream fringed by undergrowth. On the other side of the stream was an open space about twenty-five yards square, and as he took in the layout his mind was made up to attempt to save both his ship and his passengers.

A moment later he was diving slowly for that tiny clearing. Nothing short of perfection in judgment of speed and distance would avail him now, but that is just what he attained. As he glided over the trees at one edge of the clearing, the ship was practically stalled, mushing to the ground. He thrust the stick forward savagely. The next instant the wheels hit the ground heavily and the Hawk bounded high in the air. He fought to keep it there as it barely cleared the stream and the undergrowth.

The wheels struck again on the lower edge of the slope, the tail swishing through the bushes. The ship bounded again. It trundled up the slope but the steepness of it saved them. The propeller, which had been whirring slowly in the air stream on

the way down, was still revolving as it hit the trees, and the Hawk stopped unharmed.

Groody slumped in his seat. Painterfield, still lying on the wing, was smiling at him as the pilot felt for a cigar and thought—

"If I'm half as lucky as that the rest of my life, I'll live forever."

"Cripes!" came in heartfelt tones from the rear cockpit.

Groody, still limp from the strain, turned to grin at his passengers. Sweeney was taking no chances. He had his gun trained on the outlaw, with an expression on his face which seemed to indicate that he would like to pull the trigger.

"Well," said Painterfield, "here we are. Groody, that was the greatest piece of flying I ever seen. I'm damned if I don't believe those posters that're stuck all over town."

Sweeney vaulted to the ground. He strode over toward the comfortably lounging Painterfield and searched him roughly.

"Lost your gun, eh?" he growled. "Well, mister, you let me in for something and you're going to pay for it one way or another. You better be a very, very good boy, understand?"

"Sure," nodded Painterfield.

He rolled off the wing as Groody climbed out of the front cockpit.

The flyer was himself again and as his eyes rested on his captive, he came to a decision. He drew Sweeney to one side and said rapidly:

"Listen, Sweeney, you've got a chance here to make yourself a lot of money—which we'll pay you—and a reputation besides; and be justified in doing it. I mean, it's your duty, the way I look at it."

"What do you mean?" demanded Sweeney.

His eyes were bloodshot, his face pale, and he was shaking nervously from the strain he had been through.

Groody's eyes shifted to the man who had almost been his Nemesis twice. Painterfield had removed his helmet and his curly blond hair was waving in the breeze. His cold eyes were flashing with anticipation. Groody could fairly feel the emotions which were seething within the outlaw. That Painterfield was seeking even the most deperate chance for escape was a certainty.

"Listen," Groody told Sweeney. "This bird is tough. You know that. Back in town, with the backing he's got, he might never talk, understand? We've got a chance to clear up this case out here alone in the woods. Get me? And you can bet your bottom dollar that I won't be ungrateful. I'll tell you frankly that if I was alone out here . . ."

"Sure," grunted Sweeney. "I get you. Let's go."

"Now, Painterfield," Groody said, as he stalked over to him. "You're up against it."

"Looks that way," agreed Painterfield. "You hold the winning tickets."

"Furthermore," Groody pointed out, "I saved your life."

"For which I thank you," Painterfield said mockingly. "No kiddin'."

"You're a long ways from your powerful friends, young fellow," Groody told him, a cold light dancing in his eyes. "There isn't a human being that can do anything for you now. You're going to talk—if we have to use strong arm stuff on you—and you're going to tell all you know, or your corpse is going to be carried back to Covington with a little note to the effect that you were shot trying to escape. Understand that?"

"Clear as a bell," agreed Painterfield.

SWEENEY, gun in hand, was standing a short distance from Groody. His face was glowering as he looked at the apparently untroubled outlaw. He looked as if he would have enjoyed leaping on him and tearing him limb from limb.

"Well, start talkin'," he snarled.

"What do you want to know?" Painterfield asked flippantly. His attitude changed, however, as he saw the danger signals in Groody's eyes.

"Listen, Groody," he said. "I'm sorry I got into this for a lot of reasons. You're a pretty good guy, and you've got me dead to rights. I'll talk, but I don't know a hell of a lot."

"Who hired you to shoot Prince Regent?" snapped Groody.

"A bird by the name of Kelstein. Fellow about thirty-five, with a wad of dough; said he was representin' a bunch of guys from New York and around here, that was going to put over the best thing of the year in the Special," Painterfield answered.

"Where is he now?" asked Sweeney.

"I'm damned if I know, and that's the up-and-up. I saw him once, that was in Louisville, and I ain't seen him since, so help me."

His eyes were meeting Groody's frankly, but that did not necessarily mean anything, the flyer knew. In his judgment Painterfield was probably as artistic a liar as ever wagged a tongue.

"Who do you know that's connected with him, then?" Groody demanded.

"Listen, Groody," Painterfield said. "You did me a hell of a favor a little while ago, and I'm gonna come clean with the works, see? This guy Kelstein proved to me that he's tied up with a bunch of big New York gamblers, including some around this Kentucky circuit. He told me they had a horse they was going to put over in the Special for the biggest beating the bookmakers ever took since Nancy S. was put over at Havana under another name. I know the racket around the Eastern tracks, and it didn't take long to find out he knew his onions, see? That wasn't his right name, probably, or anything like—"

"How did he come to pick on you?" Groody interrupted.

Painterfield, leaning easily against the tip of the wing, grinned that flashing, curiously mirthless smile.

"Oh, lots of people like him have heard of me," he said calmly. "Anyway, he don't let me in on the thing, or anything like that; but he does say that they're smart and that they've tied up with some people around this neck of the woods that could protect 'em if anything happened. He said that there was only one thing could possibly spoil this deal they was going to pull, and that was Prince Regent, if he was right. That's the only horse in the race they was scared of. He stacked away some dough for me, gives me a cool thousand in advance, and four thousand more if I fix the Prince any way that seems best."

"Where did he leave the money?" Groody demanded.

"I'm not telling that right now."

"The hell you ain't!" bellowed Sweeney, flashing the gun menacingly.

"The hell I am!" Painterfield flared. "It won't do you no good to know where it was. I'm giving you all the dope you need, Groody, and if you want to shoot, shoot and be damned to you!"

The indomitable outlaw's eyes blazed defiantly at the apoplectic policeman, and there was murder in Sweeney's contorted face.

"Don't get excited for a minute, Sweeney," Groody said evenly. "Go ahead, Painterfield."

"Anyway," Painterfield resumed, "I was damn' sure I'd get the dough, because if I didn't, I could spill plenty o' beans, see? When you caught me that time, I didn't really know for sure that I'd be sprung from stir; but I figured I would because I had something on somebody, even if I didn't know quite who. Sure enough, twenty-five thousand comes to the jail for me, nice as you please. That shows it's big, don't it?"

"I'll say it does," Groody said slowly.

Sweeney, his wrath half forgotten, was listening, wide eyed.

"NOW all you got to know is this, Groody," Painterfield went on, "and I'm payin' you plenty for what you did a few minutes ago. Don't you put one nickel on that Prince Regent horse, or in him, either. Believe me, those guys know what they're doing, and if the Prince is as good as he ever was, right today, he's got no

more chance of winning, or maybe of even starting, than I have. Them New York guerrillas have been known to sit around a prizefight right in Madison Square Garden with their rods in their pockets to see to it that some fighter lost who was supposed to lose, get me? Do you think a little horse race is gonna stop 'em?"

"And you're sure you don't know who they are?" Groody asked, his long eyes boring into those before him.

"No, I don't. All I know is Kelstein. I didn't see him but once, and I don't know where he is. It's a cinch he ain't sticking around this neck of the woods."

"Let's leave that a minute," Groody said, taking out a fresh cigar.

He placed it, unlighted, in the corner of his mouth. For a minute he surveyed the peaceful countryside, and his mouth drooped quizzically as the contrast between the placid scene and the subject of the conversation struck him.

"What's the Thompson outfit got to do with this whole mess?" he barked suddenly.

"Not a damn' thing!"

"Then how do you happen to be flying a Thompson plane for the purpose of scaring Prince Regent in the race this afternoon?"

"I'll tell you how," Painterfield answered. "I wasn't stickin' around to get tried for that shooting, see. I slipped away from the dicks last night. I left some dough with a pal of mine, to bet according to the information I got ways of getting on Saturday's race, when the deal is pulled off. I go to Thompson and buy one of his flea bitten crates, and it just occurs to me that I ain't earned my dough yet for putting the Prince out of commission, and I just took a little chance, knowing how nervous he was, and thought maybe I could chase him so far and so long that he wouldn't be able to race until next year. When I seen your plane in the air . . ."

"Suppose I should tell you that I believe you happened along just to do this little flying stunt," Groody said with icy deliberation, "and that you took the job intending to steal the plane and get out of town; or else that you were told by your bosses to do it?"

"No use going into pipe dreams," Painterfield said gaily.

"These aren't pipe dreams," Groody answered. "What do you know about the stuff that's been going on against me?"

"Fixing your ship so you'd be bumped off?" Painterfield returned artlessly. "Why, not a thing, Groody, not a thing."

"The hell you don't!"

Groody hesitated for a moment. Then he decided to try a bluff.

"Listen, Painterfield," he said slowly. "You know you're in a pretty tough spot. The more you talk, the easier you'll get off. Do you know that we've got you for life right now, if we want to put you away? If you'll talk plenty, you'll get away easier."

"He'll talk," grunted Sweeney, "after I get through with him."

"Now," Groody went on, "suppose I should tell you that we know that the Thompson flyers wanted to take over the fifteen hundred dollar a day contracts that we have, planning to get a wing-walker of their own; that Kin Beaseley is your immediate boss; that Beaseley, and whoever his accomplices are, made some kind of a deal with this starving bunch of gypsy flyers, and that the stuff they were pulling against me and Prince Regent all centers in that gang. What would you say to that?"

"Not a word," returned the untroubled Painterfield.

"Just as you say," Groody told him, keeping up his bluff to the last. "We even know how our equipment was tampered with."

"Then why are you asking me?" Painterfield returned with an impudent grin.

"You'd better talk," Sweeney said impatiently. "Listen, Groody, this is enough of this foolishness. This guy here knows the works. There ain't a doubt in the world of it. Listen, you, don't stand here and make fun of us, understand, because we're going to work on you until you squeal for mercy."

"Is that so?" flared Painterfield.

Suddenly he was like a tiger snarling defiance at his foes.

"Groody, you listen to me. I never forget a favor or go back on a pal. I could say more, but I won't, understand? I've told you to lay off Prince Regent for your own good. And I'll tell you one more thing: you're a damn' fool to keep on with this flying stuff that you do, and you'd better lay off that, too. I don't know anything about the Thompson flyers. Remember what I'm saying. You and Redfield had better keep that colt of yours out of that race entirely, and you'd better get out of the air for your own good. Take that and be damned to you. If you think you're going to get me, you're wrong. I've done all the talking I'll ever do. I'm not going to stand trial, and if you want to bring me back dead, here's your chance."

LIKE a flash he darted around the wing tip and plunged for the shelter of the trees. Sweeney's gun came up just as he had reached the trees, barely ten feet away. What impulse caused Groody to do what he did, he could not understand.

Without thinking, he knocked the officer's gun up. Sweeney was choking with fury and Painterfield's defiant laugh from the shelter of the thick trees was like salt in a raw wound.

"Don't get excited," Groody said levelly. "He's no good to us dead, and picking him up will be as easy as—"

"He can hide in these mountains forever," roared Sweeney. "We can't chase him through the woods."

"The hell we can't. Every policeman in the country will be on the watch for him and, as far as the mountains are concerned, there's influence enough in the Kentucky Jockey Club to have the National Guard turned out, if necessary. Don't you know the people of Kentucky are raving crazy over what's being pulled off right under their noses? The only way Painterfield'll talk, is to get him back in jail and give him a combination of the third degree and the promise of getting off a little lighter. I hope he's captured alive, but—"

"I could o' winged him without killin' him."

"But I didn't want to take a chance. Can't you see, we haven't got one thing on Kin Beaseley, and only a little stuff on the Thompson flyers? Painterfield's the cornerstone of the whole proposition. If this motor can be made to run with some water, we can have airplanes out here keeping him spotted in half an hour. The Jockey Club'll spend anything."

The policeman was unconvinced, but he remained silent as they searched for a container to carry water from the brook at the foot of the slope. They finally found a rusty can, and it was almost dark before they had filled the radiator, and laboriously trod down the undergrowth at the foot of the slope so that Groody could make the takeoff he had in mind. Fortunately, the motor had not been severely damaged, and would run. Groody placed blocks under the wheels after turning the plane around, and the tail of the plane was up and the motor going at full speed before he pulled back on the stick and hopped the blocks. The plane rushed down the steep slope like a cannon ball. At the end of the swath through the undergrowth he had placed a small log, and as the wheels hit it the plane bounced safely across into the other field. There was a small opening in the thinly wooded area at the other side of the field, and he was in the air before he reached it.

Thousands of men had admired Groody's airmanship at Issouden and a dozen Army posts, but they had never seen him do a prettier piece of flying than when he banked his ship and curved it through the opening, which was fifteen feet narrower than the wing spread of the Hawk. He knew the punctured radiator would allow but a few minutes' flying, but at least he could get as far as a good field, and closer home. The ship could be fixed in time for the night exhibition.

Safely in the air, the Hawk limped northward. When the telltale knock in the engine apprised Groody that his time was short, he was over a field but five miles from the airdrome. He came down in it and climbed out of the ship with a sigh of relief. An automobile was in sight which they could probably get to carry them to the airdrome.

"Well," he said wearily, "we didn't get our man, but we did get a little dope, and on the strength of that I think that Sparrow Cantoni will sub for me tonight, and I'll take a vacation."

CHAPTER IX

DELANEY TAKES A RIDE

AT TEN o'clock that night, refreshed by a nap, the entire personnel of the Groody Flyers, except Delaney, was gathered in Tom Service's room at the hotel. Service had just come in with Buddy Redfield. Groody laid down a tall drink compounded of Kentucky Bourbon and mint, and greeted Service for the first time since early morning.

"Here comes the secret service," he remarked. "Buddy, is it true that Prince Regent wasn't hurt this afternoon?"

"Not exactly hurt," the round faced little horseman said slowly, "but I'm afraid there's just the suggestion of a limp in that bad leg of his. I'll know for sure tomorrow."

"I see you fixed up the ship in time," Service said absently. "You gave a good show, Cantoni."

The hard faced little Italian grinned with pleasure. He seemed like a new man now that he had rejoined his idols.

"Thanks," he mumbled.

"What's the dope, if any?" Groody demanded.

Service removed his glasses and polished them. His speech was crisp and incisive. There was no trace of the gentle futility of his usual manner.

"Considerable," he said. "In the first place, we've found out about Painterfield. He was once with a small outfit which did parachute jumping and wing walking, and he was their aerial acrobat."

"Oh-ho," barked Groody. "Things begin to get clearer, eh?"

"As far as the Thompson Flyers go," Service went on, "there's nothing against any of them except that they're a shiftless bunch and broke. There's only Thompson and a man named Grady. Thompson's story is that Painterfield telephoned him last night and offered him a big price if one of Thompson's pilots took him on a flight over the track during the running of the fifth race. That's a lot of poppycock of course. Painterfield wanted a plane over the racetrack to scare Prince Regent, but he didn't intend to be in it. Thompson said that he wouldn't do it himself, and Grady wouldn't do it, so it was up to Painterfield after Sparrow ran out on 'em. All there is definite on Thompson and the other flyer is that they allowed their plane to be hired for what they knew was an illegal purpose, but which, after all, is not an important infraction of the law. There is absolutely no proof that they were in on Painterfield's plans."

"Well, what do you think?" Corrigan asked Service.

Service sat down in a chair as if he did not know what he was doing—his mind a thousand miles away.

"On the other hand," he went on, "Delaney's interview with Beaseley indicates the strong possibility that the Thompson outfit are allied with the racetrack men. It's entirely possible that Delaney, realizing that Beaseley was being watched, explained his visit by pretending to be our stool pigeon. In my judgment this outfit of broke flyers, through Delaney, saw an opportunity to ally themselves with some crooked work and make some easy money which they needed desperately. This can't be proved, but I believe that as far as the Redfield Stable is concerned, Delaney is planning to double-cross us."

"Furthermore, investigation has shown

that one thousand dollars was bet by Kin Beaseley on Prince Regent this afternoon with a bookmaker downtown."

"Damn!" exclaimed Corrigan. "That lets *him* out of fixing up the airplane stuff."

"On the other hand," Service interrupted smoothly, "I think that it proves him more guilty. It was a perfect alibi, and Beaseley knows—he must know—that's he's being watched."

"No news about Reilly, eh?" asked Groody.

Service shook his head.

"Not a thing except a report from San Antonio, Texas, that a man answering Reilly's description almost exactly was questioned by a detective at the depot and denied that he was the man."

Groody, who had been sitting approximately on the back of his neck, cigar in mouth and drink in hand, suddenly snapped bolt upright.

"Gents," he said slowly, "I believe I've got an idea."

"See whether it fits in with mine," Service said, clipping his words off short. "It begins to shape up something like this in my mind. I believe there is a *coup* planned for the Special and that Painterfield, who's done two terms in jail already and is known in certain sections of gangland in New York, was really hired to get rid of Prince Regent, the only horse that could possibly spoil the chances of their own entry, if he was right.

"Painterfield has been practically broke ever since he got out of jail the last time. We found that out, too. Suppose that Painterfield conceived the idea of getting a flying circus of his own, cheap, by scaring you completely out, George. He might have planned to use the Thompson ships and take up our contracts, or even to buy our own very cheap. In other words, he's the connecting link between these racetrack crooks and our own misfortunes. His method sounds exactly like him, because one of the times he went to jail was on a little matter of scaring the life out of a jockey in New York by threatening letters, in order to fix a race."

REDFIELD and Cantoni were listening, silent and round eyed. Corrigan ran his hand through his shaggy black hair.

"But that doesn't explain why a sane man should resort to murder, when there were a dozen other easier and milder ways," he exploded.

"That's where my hunch comes in," Groody said. "The principal thing that's been puzzling me was what you've just said, Bob. And another thing has been, how those ladders and things were got to. That rumor about Reilly set me right, and I'm damned if I don't think it's as true as Gospel."

Service's blue eyes were shining like a cat's at night.

"Shoot, George," he commanded, "and see if we agree."

"Listen, all you blokes," Groody said. "Painterfield wants to get in on this fifteen hundred dollar a day racket, see? He feels that he's got plenty of protection around these parts and influence enough on account of the racetrack gang he was working for, to put over what he had in mind—scaring me out of the game, getting our ships for nothing, or practically so, or maybe the Thompson ships. Then suppose he gets to Reilly. Did you notice how forlorn old Reilly looked when we were talking about Cantoni?"

"But Reilly's the man that found the breaks," Cantoni said excitedly.

"Sure he was," Groody broke in. "They never did have any idea of really bumping me off, see? Reilly fixed the rope and the ladder, and then found the damn' things himself. That took all suspicion away from him. It scared me pink and had us all going. Then when we started suspecting the Thompson outfit—and the more I think of it, the more I believe that Painterfield had them lined up, although they didn't take any active part in the plot against me—Reilly started to get cold feet because we were on the trail. So he just disappears all on his own, and that might have been him in San Antonio, bound for Mexico."

"Which is exactly the reason," Tom

Service said calmly, "why that man is due to be picked up in Laredo tomorrow morning and made to prove that he isn't Reilly. In my judgment there's an excellent chance that the kidnapper of our ex-mechanic is Mr. Reilly himself."

Sparrow Cantoni's dark little face expressed disbelief and utter wretchedness.

"Listen, boss," he pleaded. "Reilly was all for you, honest. He was a great guy. He wouldn't have sold out to them guys."

"The hell he wouldn't have. I believe now he did," Corrigan said. "He might even have excused himself to himself. You were getting nervous, George, and all that stuff; and now that I remember it—"

"Yes," Groody nodded. "Reilly sometimes almost cried when he was asking me to quit for a while. He might have thought he was doing me a good turn to scare me out of it, because he was one Irishman who had no hope whatever that I'd stay on earth very long."

Corrigan leaped to his feet and started pacing up and down with long strides.

"I believe we've got it," he said. "If that posse can only get Painterfield, or if we can nab Reilly, I believe we'll have it set."

"If that's so," Groody said, "all we've got on our minds now is the proposition of whether to take a chance of bankrupting ourselves Saturday on a race, when all we've got to worry about is how many New York gunmen are hanging around this town to see that we lose. I may be a damn' fool, but that was one section of my friend, Joe Painterfield's remarks, that I believe."

"Why, in particular?" demanded Corrigan.

Groody sipped his drink thoughtfully, as though trying to marshal his thoughts before answering. Buddy Redfield, who had taken little part in the conversation and seemed to be more or less in a daze, lighted a cigaret and shifted uncomfortably.

"Well, I tell you," Groody said finally. "Guys like that usually have a sort of a creed of their own, if you know what I mean. This 'not going back on a pal' stuff, and all the rest of it that Painterfield mentioned, is the same idea as a lot of them have."

Service nodded his agreement.

"I did Painterfield quite a favor," Groody went on. "And I sort of believe he's the kind of fellow who'd want to pay me back. He wouldn't do enough talking to get anybody in trouble, but he would spill enough of the works to me to save me losing some money. His yarn about the race might have been inaccurate in a lot of ways, to cover up his friends, but the main point, which is that Prince Regent is a damn' poor investment in the Special, I think that bozo really meant."

REDFIELD leaped to his feet as though unable to sit still longer. He wandered around restlessly as he said:

"This is the damnedest thing I ever heard of. Fixing a race by hook or crook happens all the time, all right, but in that Special there isn't a horse that comes within five miles of being a sure thing, even if Prince Regent was out!"

"No horse in it that could be under cover?" Groody inquired.

Redfield lighted another cigaret from the end of the one he had been smoking and shook his head.

"All except two of the entries," he said, "are well known stake horses—old campaigners. They're the class of the country, pretty near, and what they can do when they're right is known to a split second. Furthermore, every one of them has run in a lot of big races where it's a dead cinch they weren't being held in."

"What about them two platers?" Cantoni interjected.

"That," Redfield said slowly, "might be the solution. You remember, I told you, George, they're entered by a couple of bozos that used to be pretty friendly with Kin Beaseley, and probably still are."

"You think he might own a half in-

terest, or at least some interest in one or the other of them, don't you?" Groody asked.

Redfield nodded.

"But that doesn't alter the fact that neither one of those dogs has a Chinaman's chance," he said flatly. "Good Lord, the idea of either one of them leading that Special field to the wire is ridiculous."

"Maybe it ain't so impossible, at that," said Cantoni. "A little sniff of white dust, or a pill on one of their tongues might make a hell of a lot of difference."

Redfield shook his head stubbornly.

"There never has been anything invented to make a horse run faster than he can," he said. "If one of them ever did come home he'd pay a hundred to one in that field. It's just downright impossible, I tell you."

"Well," Service pointed out, "it may be that among the real horses in that race, there's one right on the razor edge, fit for the race of his life, and—"

"A couple of seconds faster than he's ever been before, eh?" Redfield interrupted. "That may be; and, of course, probably half a dozen of the trainers whose horses are in tiptop shape have a hunch they're going to come home in front. They wouldn't be entered otherwise. But my point is that with twelve stake horses, all of them cracks, you can't tell me that there's any horse in that race that's a sure enough thing to shoot a fortune on, or go to all this trouble about."

"Well," Groody said deliberately, "if the gang does get away with their scheme after all the publicity they've had, we'll have to take our hats off to 'em."

"I'll say," nodded Redfield. "The Jockey Club will have about a thousand guards, four extra veterinaries, and heaven knows what, to see that everything's on the level."

"Say," said Cantoni. "It ain't goin' to be so hot for whoever does win the race, is it? People'll be thinkin' that maybe they was in on this gang stuff, if it proves to be a sleeper."

Redfield nodded.

"Lord, how I hope Prince Regent's right," he said, half to himself.

"You're a little bit afraid of that leg, eh?" Groody asked.

Buddy nodded again, his face dark and brooding.

"We can tell in the morning," he said.

For a moment there was silence. Groody's mouth thinned and his eyes seemed slightly shadowed as the fact that perhaps his dreams of making the money might not come true swept over him. He felt a sense of futility, fighting against odds that were as overwhelming as they were mysterious.

"Well," he said finally, "if worse comes to worse, we can stagger along, I suppose. There's nothing changed on those contracts, is there, Tom?"

"No," Service said promptly. "All this stuff's made you more valuable than ever. We can work a solid two months at ten thousand a week, if we want to."

"Which we don't," Groody stated. "By the way, just where does all this stuff leave our friend, Delaney?"

"I've thought about that quite a lot," Service said. "He may be right on the level—on the other hand, he might be in it right up to his neck. I don't like that business of him talking to Beaseley."

"Neither do I," Corrigan agreed. "He might have traded on his friendship for Groody to plant himself as a stool pigeon around us—"

"And then when the Beaseley thing came up that morning when we went over to see Buddy, he saw a chance to make himself some quick and crooked dough," Groody finished for him.

"But he had a chance to do that with us, if Prince Regent won," Redfield pointed out.

"The other might have seemed surer and bigger, though," Service said. "We haven't got any more on him. He hasn't even seen Beaseley, but he might have done a lot of telephoning, of course. And —his explanation of trying to help us out might have been true. The main thing to consider, though, is his flying."

"It strikes me like this," Groody said.

"I believe that our hunch about Reilly comes pretty close to the truth and that nobody is really out to murder me. Furthermore, with all this race stuff coming up and whatever else is on the fire, working on us don't seem to be so important any more. I don't believe there's any reason why Delaney shouldn't keep on flying with us, until we have a chance to get the dope on him, if any."

As he ceased speaking, a loud knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," Groody shouted, and the door was literally flung open.

THE NEXT second Groody was on his feet. It was Delaney, and back of him there was a policeman who seemed to be half supporting him. The big flyer's head was bandaged, his clothes had been half ripped from his body, and he walked uncertainly. His swollen lips widened in a smile as he staggered in and dropped wearily into a chair.

"What happened?" Service demanded crisply.

"I got taken for a ride," Delaney answered briefly.

"What do you mean? Is he under arrest, Officer?"

"Hell, no!" the policeman returned.

The door was still open and two men in plain clothes entered without ceremony.

"Hello, Charlie. Hello, Pete," the policeman greeted them. "I called you up because I didn't want to wait till we got to the station house. These are them flyers—you know."

The detectives nodded.

"What's the lay?" the bigger one asked calmly.

"Tell 'em, Mr. Delaney," the policeman directed.

"It was like this," Delaney said. "I was out at the field, and a couple of men in an automobile called me over. Before I knew it, they had grabbed me and stuck me in the back seat and were on their way. It was dark and I couldn't see 'em very well, and the second they got me they put on masks, besides. They didn't try to beat me up or nothin'—then. They said that I was to tell Redfield and Two Spot that if Two Spot rode Prince Regent in the Special, he was as good as dead. They said they'd get him if it took six months, and that he'd be a marked nigger from that time on."

"I knew it!" exploded Redfield, and there was real anguish in his eyes and voice. "They know, damn them, that getting rid of Two Spot would be just as good as getting rid of Prince Regent. They're threatening the poor little coon's life, are they?"

Delaney nodded.

"That's what they said, and boy, they acted as though they meant it. They said they tried to be nice, made an offer to you, Redfield, of ten thousand bucks to keep the Prince out of the race."

"That's a damn' lie," Redfield said. "I never got any offer."

"That's what they said, anyway," Delaney went on doggedly. "And they said there'd be five thousand for Two Spot and ten thousand for you to keep the horse out of the race, but if Two Spot rode him, he was going to be found shot."

"Did they say who they were acting for—I mean, give any idea at all?" Service broke in.

Delaney shook his head.

"No," he said. "They just said that they meant business and weren't to be fooled with."

"All going to show the same gang stuff that Painterfield spoke about," Groody said. "How did you get beaten up, Delaney?"

"I thought I saw a chance to grab them when they were off guard," Delaney explained. "I got all set and cracked one of them, and pretty near did it, but they got the best of me, and then what they did was plenty. Left me on the side of the road out like a light. A guy in an automobile came along and found me."

"Now let's get the right of this," the smaller detective said. "You—"

"Wait a minute, Officer, will you?" Service asked. "Redfield, it looks to me as though Prince Regent, for one reason

or another, wasn't going to win the Special."

Redfield's face was haggard.

"I believe you're right," he groaned. "I can't ask little Two Spot to ride for me when it would mean that a gang of murdering thugs would be trailing him from then on. His life would be an absolute misery, whether anything ever happened to him or not."

"What do you think he'd say about it?" Groody put in.

Redfield hesitated.

"I think he'd ride if I told him to," he said simply.

"Well, there's one cinch," Groody stated. "He's got to be told the whole situation and the thing left up to him, don't you think so?"

Redfield nodded.

"And I've got to tell him that he'll be a damn' fool to ride unless we can round up this bunch of thugs!"

"If we can only get Painterfield before Saturday," Corrigan breathed, and it was like a prayer.

"They've got four hundred men up there in the mountains, or almost that number. I believe they'll get him, especially with planes."

"Yeah," rasped one of the detectives. "And when we get that guy, he's goin' to be so glad to talk before we're through with him that he'll be beggin' for a chance."

"Well, now let's get the right of this."

They went on to question Delaney minutely, but the battered flyer was unable to help them much. He could give only the sketchiest description of either of his assailants, and he was not even certain of the make of car which they had used, except that it was a cheap open touring car.

At Service's suggestion the detectives agreed to see that he got to a hospital for the night, at least, after being taken to the police station. When they had left, the five men looked at each other for a moment, as though each was afraid to say the first word.

"Well," Service said finally, "it looks as though Delaney was on our side, doesn't it?"

"You can't go back of tonight," agreed Corrigan. "The whole thing seems to be proof enough that he isn't in on the racetrack stuff, inasmuch as he's willing to take a beating for us."

"Well," Groody said, as he stretched and yawned, "I'm all fed up. My brains are running in circles, and I'm going to bed." He got up and lounged to the door. "Between Reilly and Painterfield, and one thing and another," he went on deliberately, "it sure looks as though we had a chance to get somewhere. That's the only little ray of sunshine there seems to be. Well, tomorrow's a new day and if it's like the last few, Mr. George X. Groody needs to do a lot of ear pounding. I've got a hunch there's plenty going to happen between now and Saturday—"

"And," interjected Redfield, "I'd give my left arm if all of it was going to happen to these damn' crooks."

CHAPTER X

TWO SPOT DECIDES TO RIDE

IT WAS the witching hour of 5:30 A. M. on the following Saturday morning, when six men filed solemnly to the outside rail of the track and one by one took seats upon it. Back of them the stables were stirring into life. It seemed that there was already an atmosphere of taut anticipation which made the very air electric. There was an excited note in the voices of the stable boys; and the jockeys, bundled up in sweaters, walked about nervously as they waited for their mounts.

Far away across the mist shrouded track, the yawning stands were being cleaned by a small army of attendants, whose movements seemed to be faster than usual. The Special was to be run that afternoon, and in the whole history of the American turf, there had never been a race upon which so many eyes were focused.

The six young men, who had taken seats at some distance from the group of

clockers and trainers, sat silently for a moment, perched on the rail like so many brooding crows. Back of them, Two Spot Jackson was leading Prince Regent up and down. In a moment they would be out on the track for the last warmup gallop. All that was at stake on Prince Regent's showing that day made a crushing burden which weighed down the spirits of Groody and his companions.

Sparrow Cantoni was as nervous as a witch, and even Groody found his feet tapping nervously at the middle rail as he stared absently at the great green stands across the infield. Redfield was quiet and depressed, and Bob Corrigan's face was like a thunder cloud. He was frowning blackly, as if the world itself were all wrong.

The first horse cantered out on the track. Standing in the stirrups was Earl Randolph, premier rider of the American turf, and the beautiful animal he was bestriding was Whisked Away, the hope of the Whitney stable.

"There goes a colt that'll take some beating, with Earl up," Redfield said absently.

"He sure looks it," agreed Cantoni. "How's he been training?"

"O. K," nodded Redfield.

Groody took a newspaper from his pocket and stared at it for a moment.

"Well, boys," he said slowly. "There aren't many more hours left for us to make up our minds just what the hell we're going to do."

"The money's here, eh?" Redfield asked. His voice indicated that it would not make much difference whether it was available or not.

Service nodded.

"It's at the Western Union," he said.

"If they'd only got Painterfield," Corrigan said. "Then we might know where we stood."

"I was sure they had him nabbed yesterday," Service said quietly. "And it's no cinch that they won't have him before the race, even now."

"Hell, they'll have to have him three or four hours before the race to do us any good," Cantoni said savagely. "He's got to be brought down here and worked on by the cops, ain't he?"

"It would seem that way," Service agreed. "He's bound to be the key to the whole situation."

One by one horses were coming out on the track, but Groody did not even look at them. As Service finished speaking, he hopped down from the fence. He lighted a cigar, his eyes dark and his face grim and drawn.

"Of all the tough breaks," he said, biting off his words viciously. "We get Reilly figured out right to a T, then he slips out of our hands between San Antone and Laredo, and we get a letter from Mexico!"

"Oh, well, it wouldn't mean so much to have him," Groody pointed out soothingly. "It's a dead cinch that the particular one behind Reilly's doing what he did was Painterfield. His past record, the fact that he had done some air circus stuff and all the rest of it makes it open and shut."

"Well, even granting that," said Corrigan, "we still haven't got one piece of dope on anybody except Reilly himself—not even those Thompson flyers."

"And I don't believe they were in on it," Delaney said decisively. "No reason why they should've been, even if Painterfield was going to use us after he got you out of the way. Why should he let anybody in on his plans? He didn't need any help, except Reilly's, and honest, Thompson and Grady aren't such bad guys. That little business of flyin' across the racetrack wasn't so good, of course, but then it wasn't so terrible, either. The Lord knows they needed a little dough."

"If they do know anything," Service said gently, "they're sure good liars. They've been worked on about twenty-four hours a day ever since, so the cops say, and there hasn't been anything dragged out of them."

"No more dope on Beaseley, either, eh?" Redfield asked hopelessly.

Service shook his head.

"No, he's too smart," he answered.

"Lord, how I'd like to know whether he and One Eyed Farbell are up to anything together," Redfield exclaimed. "I'm as sure as I am of the fact that the Lord made little apples that the old son of a gun's got a scheme to make a lot of dough out of this race, and in spite of Painterfield or anybody else, I believe he was in on that shooting of Prince Regent!"

"So am I," Service said. "It's perfectly reasonable to believe that after years on the racetrack, and owning a gambling house and all the rest of it, that he's in good and strong with the underworld. I don't think it's all his doing. He's one of a gang, and I wouldn't be surprised if Painterfield was on the level when he said it was mainly city crooks from the East and big operators that are in on it. I suppose Two Spot is in for another one of those letters today?"

REDFIELD nodded. It seemed that the chunky little horseman had lost twenty pounds in the last few days. His face, ordinarily round and unlined, now showed hollows below the cheekbones, wrinkles between his brows, and two deep marks from his nostrils to his mouth. His eyes were sunken and the line of his jaw was fleshless.

"The poor little coon's a wreck," he mumbled. "To come right out in the open, I don't know whether he could ride the horse even if I let him."

"What do you think, Tom—honest?" Groody asked suddenly. "Do you really believe this bunch'd go through with bumping off Two Spot if he rode the race?"

Service's broad face was serious and his round blue eyes were glittering as he nodded.

"That's the way that brand of thugs keeps up their reputation," he said calmly. "When they spot a man that can do them some good in this so called sporting world, they aim to have their orders obeyed. I'm afraid that if their betting coup, whatever it is, is spoiled, that little Two Spot's going to be one marked nigger—unless we get them out of the way."

"Here comes the Prince," Sparrow interrupted.

As the kingly black cakewalked out on the track there were six other horses cantering around the oval. Whisked Away was the only special candidate that had yet appeared, but others were being walked up and down around the barns. The dozens of clockers and trainers shifted their attention from the galloping horses to Prince Regent; and the most discussed horse in the race, plus the little jockey whose name had become a household word in the last three days, became the cynosure of all eyes.

Two Spot brought the Prince dancing up close to the flyers. The colt seemed nervous and fearful. He was snorting and shying, his feet never still, and there was a certain wildness in his eyes which was not usually there when his friend was on his back.

"Good Lord, Two Spot *is* a wreck!" breathed Groody.

His statement was no exaggeration. There was no wide ivory smile, nor any sparkle in the eyes of the little jockey. His coal black face seemed almost gray, and his eyes darted around in fear, even then. It was as if the strain under which the rider was laboring had communicated itself to his horse, for Prince Regent's head was tossing, his ears working ceaselessly, and his eyes rolling around as in search of an enemy.

"What—what d'you want him to do, boss?" the little negro quavered. "Stand still, crowbait!"

The order to Prince Regent was not couched in the affectionate tones in which Two Spot customarily addressed his charge. There was something almost savage in what he said. It seemed that he and Prince Regent were at odds.

"Gallop him around once, easy, and finish with a pretty good half mile in about fifty-five," Redfield told him. "Just to warm up and as a little bracer."

Two Spot nodded and Prince Regent was off down the track. The horse was

fighting for his head, but in Two Spot's wide shoulders and huge forearms there was gorilla-like strength, and he kept the black under control. Every eye followed the horse as he devoured the mile in faultless strides.

"His leg is perfect," Redfield said as Prince Regent went into the second lap of his easy journey. "Let's see how he acts when Two Spot lets him out a little."

Redfield had field glasses to his eyes as Prince Regent and his rider reached the mile and a half. At that point, when Two Spot let out a wrap, it seemed as if Prince Regent had been suddenly shot from a gun. The jockey was sawing at his mouth but the Prince would not be denied. He sped around the turn and down the stretch, fighting for his head, and to Groody, who was without glasses, it seemed that he was running as fast as a horse had ever run. It took Two Spot a full half mile to slow him down to a hand gallop, after he had passed the wire. When he came dancing up to the entrance to the track, the Prince was still crying to run. He was not even breathing hard.

"Outside of being nervous," Redfield said proudly, "he never was in better shape in his life. Just how much the condition he's in is going to take out of him before this afternoon, nobody can tell, but he's on razor edge right this minute. Cool him out, Two Spot."

FOR a moment there was silence. Horses were pouring on the track in a steady stream but Groody's eyes watched them without particular interest, although he knew there must be some of the great Special horses among them. He glanced down the line of his companions' set faces and, despite the seriousness of the situation, his mouth dropped mockingly as he surveyed them.

Cantoni's sharp little face was savage, and Delaney's scarred square countenance was the picture of woe. Service was impassive, though his eyes were very bright, and Corrigan looked as though he wanted to fight the universe. Redfield, his battered felt hat pulled down over his eyes, was brooding bitterly.

"Well," Groody said finally. "Presuming that at four o'clock this afternoon, or whenever it is the race comes off—"

"Let's wait a minute," Redfield interrupted. "Let me see what these other horses look like. There's Beware and Bustle About, the Braden pair. They'll carry all the money in Kentucky, and they ought to have a good chance, too."

The two bays he referred to had run one-two in the Derby the spring before. They were breaking into a gallop. As they passed the flyers, Redfield's eyes traveled over them briefly. They were perspiring normally and, from glistening coats to pricked ears, they looked fit and ready.

"They're O. K," Buddy nodded. "Rarin' to go. Here comes Juniper June out."

The beautiful sorrel mare sped out on the track.

"That's Weedy Dickens aboard her," Buddy told them. "The best rider developed on the winter tracks in five years; and she's just about the best horse. Won the Cofforth Derby at Tia Juana and a lot of stakes at New Orleans; and they say the Coast, from Hollywood to Tia Juana, is backing her till the cows come home. Looks a little bit high in flesh to me, but if she's right, she won't be far away when the bell rings."

Groody watched Juniper June break into a curious jerky gallop.

"She's got a funny stride," he remarked.

"Yes," agreed Redfield. "But when they let her out she just flattens down and buck jumps along like a sprinter for the last half mile. Great mare. Now, here comes a real horse!"

It was a huge chestnut stallion who came rearing and buck jumping out on the track, with his rider working desperately to keep him under control. He was much bigger than the average racehorse, with huge shoulders and mighty haunches which made him seem like an animal twice as powerful as the slender, dainty Juniper June. He was about Prince Re-

gent's size, but built more sturdily, with a thick, curving neck and broad face which gave him almost the appearance of the heavy chargers pictured in old battle prints.

"That, boys," Redfield said, with admiration glowing in his eyes, "is Go Way. He won the last Saratoga Cup, the Latonia Derby right here, and the only reason why he isn't almost close to a cinch, barring Prince Regent, is that a mile and a quarter isn't quite long enough for him to do his stuff."

"He's a stayer, is he?" queried Cantoni.

"I'll say," Redfield returned. "He hasn't got such a hell of a lot of speed, but what he's got he can keep forever. He'll be about last for the first six furlongs, but from there on he'll just plug right along and run over horses until the finish. He'll be going faster three hundred yards beyond the wire than he was at the start. Look at him get to work."

Go Way was running now, neck arched over and head down like a plodding bulldog.

"Verne Slator's having his hands full with him," Redfield pointed out. "See that black with the white foot just ahead of him—that's War Cruiser, the best of the last Man O' War get. He's a little green yet, but has got a chance of being almost as good as his daddy. Picked up the Preakness and fifty thousand bucks against a high class field.

"No wonder you're going crazy trying to figure out that field," said Service.

STABLE boys were now flocking to the rail to watch the kings of the equine world go through their paces. The clockers were talking busily; among the swarm of stable attachés there was a continuous barrage of crisp chatter. Every one on the track was in the grip of a repressed excitement, which showed itself in a thousand ways. Never had there been a race with so many real champions entered in it; and never had there been a race which had drawn the attention of so many million ordinarily uninterested people. What was at stake in the race itself was enough to make it stand out; but there was not a man connected with the track who was not more nervous than he otherwise would have been, because of the common knowledge that a projected coup was in the air.

For days the possibilities had been discussed almost to the exclusion of everything else. What stable and what horses were the intended medium of the upset was known to no one. Every groom and exercise boy had a different idea.

"Of course," Redfield said slowly, "any horse there will pay. None of them will be less than three to one, and damn' good horses, like Juniper June, will probably pay five or six. I'd pick Go Way around three to one; the Braden entries about the same because there's two of them; the Man O' War colt around five, with your money back, and Whisked Away about the same. A Whitney horse'll always carry money because they're always running to win, but then, every horse in this race will be running for the works."

"It would certainly seem," Groody suggested, "that those two outsiders must be in there for something—"

"Peggy B and Champ, you mean?" Redfield interrupted. "I don't know. They must have some wild idea of putting Champ over, but as I say, even if he was as good as he ever was and had a heart besides, he never showed anything in his prime that would make him more than outside chance in this field. Good Lord, man, the best horse in America's going to win this race. Here comes Champ now . . ."

"Not a bad looking horse," Groody said.

The colt was a bay of average size, with somewhat spindly legs and a deep chest. He looked as fleet as a greyhound and it was plain, even to Groody's unaccustomed eyes, that the horse was in excellent condition.

"Good Lord, they've sure got him bandaged enough," Corrigan said. "All four legs—see?"

"Yes, but they'll probably take those

off before the race," Buddy told him. "Say, but he looks better than he has any other morning. Look at him go!"

Champ was fairly burning up the track, despite the efforts of his rider to hold him.

"Well, he always was a morning glory," Buddy said. "He could do a measured mile all by himself, or used to be able to, almost as fast as any horse. That's another thing, too. Champ never, even in his prime, won a race more than six furlongs as a two year old, and a mile when he was three. Look at little Peggy B—she's feeling pretty frisky herself."

The despised filly was a homely, ewe necked roan with a ratty tail and ribs which showed plainly through the skin. She ran with her tail held high and her head up, as though querulously surprised that she should be forced to the effort.

"She's got a stable boy up," Buddy said, his glasses to his eyes. "That's Jack Bender on Champ, and he's picked to ride him this afternoon. He's a smart rider and not so damn' particular a one either. He was set down last year for two months at Lexington."

"Well, gents," Groody said, "it's soon going to be time for us to mosey back for some breakfast, and get the flying over. Buck up, Delaney. You look as though you'd lost your last friend."

"I don't know why," mumbled Delaney, "but I feel rotten as hell."

"I suppose you think Buddy feels like a two year old," Groody said sardonically. "And the rest of us happy as kids at a picnic. Well, gentlemen of the jury, just what the hell are we going to do? We've got thirty thousand bucks at the Western Union, and if we lose it, we kiss goodby to at least one hundred thousand in Texas. Providing that at four o'clock this afternoon things are just as they are now, with probably another little threat of murder to Two Spot added, what are we going to do?"

"In the f-first place," Service said, taking off his glasses, "what do you think about the P-Prince, Buddy?"

"Outside of being nervous, he's fit to go," Redfield said crisply. "If he don't fret too much this morning—and I'll see that Two Spot stays away from him—I'd say he was the best bet in the race, although not as perfect as he would be if Two Spot wasn't having nervous prostration."

"THE TRACK'LL be closely guarded," Service said. "The whole w-works will be looked over carefully, and anybody that pulls anything very rough'll probably be lynched."

"I'll say they will," Groody agreed.

"It comes down then," said Service, "to Two Spot. Providing he'll ride, should we let him?"

"Let's wander over there," suggested Redfield, as if physical action was a necessity. "Don't forget this, boys," he went on, as they climbed off the fence. "There's plenty that can happen in a race. White boys'll gang up on a coon, regardless, and Prince Regent'll have a tough enough row to hoe without that. Somehow or other I've got a rotten feeling that even if we came to the post under better circumstances than it looks like we will now, there's plenty would happen in that race. If there's really so much crooked dough going to be put up on it, there's a chance of bumping, riding off and what have you?"

It was a silent, distracted group that lounged over to where Two Spot was leading the blanketed Prince Regent around the covered path surrounding his stable. Redfield went over to the horse and jockey, but the flyers stayed several yards away.

"The Prince's more haired up than usual," Sparrow Cantoni said. "Looks to me as though he'd jump out of his skin if one of us got within a mile of him."

Redfield took the horse's halter as he said something to Two Spot. A moment later they had the horse in his stall and were rubbing him down. The flyers waited silently. To Groody it seemed that there was some burden upon him which was becoming steadily heavier. It

seemed that he was being urged, against his will, into making a big mistake; and to save his soul, he could not decide which of the two alternatives that faced him would be the mistake.

Finally Redfield and the little negro came out of the stall and walked toward the brooding airmen, who, each in his separate manner, indicated plainly the feelings within him. Delaney, particularly, seemed to be in the depths of depression. Frowsy, as always, and looking as though he had not shaved recently, the burly flyer was staring steadily at the ground, seemingly seeing unpleasant visions there. Cantoni's face was grim and set. He kicked at stones viciously, and his hard black eyes glowed angrily.

Groody's eyes rested speculatively on Two Spot. The stunted little jockey's huge shoulders were slumped forward and, somehow, his choppy, bowlegged stride was not ludicrous now. His round black face had thinned and he was nervous. His eyes darted around at the stable attachés who were running to and fro, as though any one of them might have been his enemy. There was tragedy in his black eyes as he lifted them to Groody.

"Well, Two Spot," the flyer said, "how's the boy this morning?"

"Not so good, Lieutinint," Jackson said in low tones.

"Those letters and things've got your goat, eh?" Corrigan asked him, and his deep voice was softer than usual.

"Yessuh," nodded Jackson. There was something very like despair in his voice. His eyes were on the ground and he was furrowing the dust with one toe.

"Listen, Two Spot," Redfield said gently. "If it should seem that the Prince was O. K. this afternoon, and we should leave everything entirely up to you, what do you think you'd decide?"

The little jockey's face worked and it seemed that he was about to cry. For a moment there was silence.

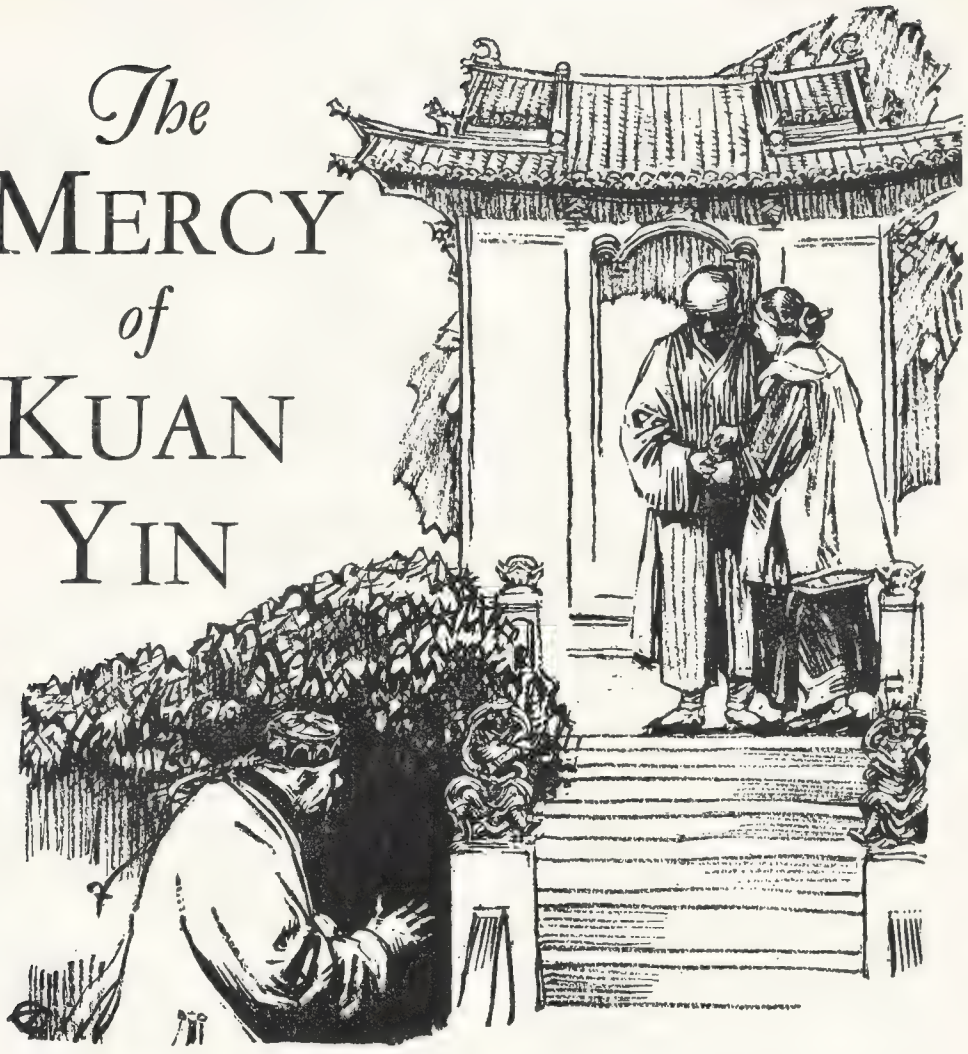
"Listen, boss," he said, his voice quavering, "Ah knows all this here means to you, and you done plenty for me. Damn 'em all, Ah'm gwine to ride!"

Redfield's smile held a world of fondness as he glanced down at the trembling jockey. Groody had a lump in his throat.

"But you can't ride, Two Spot," Redfield said gently, "if Prince Regent's scratched."

TO BE CONCLUDED

The MERCY of KUAN YIN



A Delightful Tale of a Chinese Miser Who Had Two Equal Loves—His Gold and His Son

By JAMES W. BENNETT *and* SOONG KWEN-LING

CHANGYUAN was an unlucky section of country. Floods interwove themselves with droughts in an unrolling pattern of sorrow. Yet its people were patient and uncomplaining.

Lien-ching was the only rich man in this district. He had not inherited his money. Far from it! His profession was that of manufacturer, middleman and, most important of all and most lucrative, money lender. Each day, poor folk gathered about his wormeaten old desk in quest of silver.

One particular morning he had an unusually large number of supplicants.

Lien-ching's eye brightened as he glanced over them. He signaled out one man, who dwelt near by.

"Neighbor, what is your wish today? Money as usual? But, tell me, why do you bring that boy with you? He is not your son."

"To obtain your help, sir. The child is my nephew. He has gone two days without food. I have done the same."

"Um. I see. Well, I am a generous man. I shall loan you forty dollars—at the usual interest. Just as a formality, you will give me a mortgage on your house."

With a despairing sigh, the applicant agreed. The "usual" interest was thirty-five per cent.

"And now, what is the matter with *you?*" asked Lien-ching, turning to a puny woman with sallow cheeks. His voice had become curt.

"My husband, sir—he has been down with a broken ankle half a month now. And we have no—"

"Yes! Yes!" interrupted Lien-ching. "You have no money. Yet, when you get money you spend it. You buy wine and meat. *I* haven't touched wine for twenty years, nor meat for ten. You already owe me fifty dollars. I took over the mortgage on your house out of pure kindness; for I doubt if I can realize that much from it. But no one can say that I am not the most generous man in Chang-yuan. You look strong and healthy. I can loan you twenty dollars—"

He fished in his desk and drew out a blank form.

"Here, you will put your chop to this indenture. It binds your services to me, for work in my hemp factory, during the next three months. I must take the risk, naturally, of your becoming ill there, for it's a dusty place. However, I am a generous man."

He eyed the crowd smilingly. Lien-ching enjoyed his sense of power over these cringing people. He was able to persuade himself, at those moments, that he was a philanthropist. His were the delightful sensations of one who gives often and liberally to a worthy cause.

On the outskirts of the throng, Lien-ching suddenly espied a cadaverous old figure, clad in a clean but threadbare Buddhist robe. The man waited quietly. His eyes were unsmiling, filled with pity for those who stood around him. His mouth, thin lipped, ascetic, had grown stern.

"Rascally begging priest!" Lien-ching shouted. "Are you here again? Haven't I told you that I've given you far too much money already?"

Tsung, the priest, guardian of the small district temple to the goddess Kuan Yin, lifted his head. Then, as the full import of the financier's words came to him, he bowed meekly and made as if to withdraw. But Lien-ching would not permit this.

"Wait!" he commanded. "Tell these people here the truth. Did I not faithfully obey every promise I made you, after the birth of my son? Did I not gild your statue? Did I not pay for a great many five day masses? Did I not buy large bundles of candles and incense and paper sycee?"

All of these things, possibly—by stretching the point a very long way—Lien-ching had done. Yet in every detail he had given but the barest interpretation to his promises. Now, however, Tsung hesitated to expose the despot. He knew that a slim chance always existed that Lien-ching might relent and give some small endowment to the poverty stricken temple. Therefore he nodded his shaven head, with its twelve scars of his novitiate, and sadly left the room. Across his mind was written the gloomy knowledge that within another month his tabernacle must close its doors. For his own food, to keep alive, he must go begging. The district was too poor to support the temple; the gods themselves flourished or fell with the prosperity of the land.

At the door Tsung was met by Lien-ching's wife, a frail, faded woman, a slave to her husband and to her son.

"Did my husband give?" she asked the old man anxiously.

"No, his heart is still hard against me."

"You—you will not call down the curse of Kuan Yin upon us?"

The priest's wrinkled face became even more lined by a gentle smile.

"It is not I who can direct the curses of the *bodhisattvas*. They see and weigh. Your husband's love of money is but one of the experiences that he must follow—in the inevitable workings of the Law. Perhaps, you see, in a former incarnation he sinned. And now he must pay—"

"But I *don't* see," interrupted the wife. "It is true that his love of money is all compelling. Yet he has been able to gratify that passion. How, then, is he paying?"

"Because he is the unhappiest man in Changyuan. Devils beset him, causing him to fear that he will lose his silver. Other devils assail him, forcing him to struggle to lay up more and more. He is bound to the Wheel."

"My husband has one other love," the woman answered slowly, prompted by a belated sense of loyalty.

"Yes, I know. His son. Yet I am sure that the merciful Kuan Yin lent a more attentive ear to your pleadings than she did to your husband's promise of a thousand taels."

The wife rung her hands.

"He promised—a thousand? And how much did he actually give?"

"Two hundred. And possibly two hundred taels more in exceedingly poor gold leaf for the image. I have asked for the balance, but he pretends that he has paid it all."

"Then, since *he* will not—" she swallowed hard—"why, I must."

"What can you do?"

"Never mind what."

Tsung looked at her sharply.

"You must not steal it. That is forbidden by our Holy Law. Misfortune will come to you."

"Never mind what I shall do," she repeated, with that peculiarly overwhelming stubbornness of the weak. "For years—before my son was born—I listened to my husband's threats that he would take a concubine. I bore his explosions of anger that I was barren. Then, when I would have broken the Law in a way beyond all redemption—"

"What?" The eyes of the priest were startled. "You contemplated suicide?"

She gazed at him dully.

"Yes. And the goddess not only saved my life but she gave me—" the woman's breath caught—"a strong, healthy son. So you see why I *must* fulfill my husband's pledge."

The priest nodded, but his face was troubled, uncertain.

"Perhaps it is so decreed in the scroll of the heavens."

THE GREATER portion of Lien-ching's money was safely out at interest, or doing yeoman's service in his factory or farms. However, he always kept on hand a small but adequate supply to use in making loans and to meet the needs of his frugal household. This money he piled in the top drawer of his scarred, wormeaten desk.

Like the good man of business that he was, Lien-ching kept the most accurate of tallies on his cash supply. Not that he feared to lose it—he had no servants except a blind old gateman, who never entered the house. His wife, he knew, lived in deadly fear of him. As for his five year old son—had the boy come to him and asked for money, he would have given his offspring the entire pile of silver. This was a weakness on his own part, Lien-ching knew. But, he told himself comfortably, every great man must have some vulnerable spot.

Besides, it was natural that he should be lenient in this respect. An heir was a necessity to him. Already the specter was rising: He could not take his money with him to the next world he well knew. But, with a son to convert a proper amount of it into paper sycee, to burn it at stated intervals before his spirit tablet . . . well, that was an excellent substitute. For one must have some coin of the realm, even in the shadowy afterworld; the more

money his son burned, the richer his son's father would be—beyond the border.

That afternoon, when he had finished his lunch, Lien-ching smiled as he thought of that thin, lecherous priest. And at the temple guardian's meek appeals. His wife, too, had been asking him to give to Tsung. Did they think they would get a penny of his money? The idea was so absurd, so grotesque that he laughed and laughed again . . .

Thinking of his silver brought to mind that he had not counted it that day. He went into his study and opened the desk drawer. He used neither lock nor key, since his wife had been warned not even to touch a dust cloth to that bit of furniture. A large pile of silver dollars caused his eye to brighten. Then he gazed at it again—a practised look. With a swift motion he caught it up in a double handful. The shining silver pieces jingled pleasantly on the wooden surface. Rapidly he began to count.

A moment later he called his wife into the room. Two spots of color flamed in her cheeks. Otherwise she was calm. He had expected to find her frightened and ill at ease.

"Were you in this part of the house before noon today?"

"No."

"Well, who was, then?"

"I don't know."

"Was my son here?"

Fear ran like a lightning flash across her face.

"No!" she answered vehemently.

The very violence of her denial satisfied him on the last score. She was not intending to hide behind the child's bib, at least.

"If I find any more money gone—five dollars, by the way, are missing now—I shall make your heart savor the bitterness of the bamboo." Lien-ching's mouth was a hard, straight line.

"I understand," his wife answered quietly, and left the room.

Her withdrawal was unexpected. He had been on the point of delivering another threat. But, even as the curtain swung back into place from her exit, a new thought had come to him. He would watch. He would not even beat her as he had threatened. He had just thought of a scheme to get the money back: He would trace it to its recipient, the person to whom she had given it. He could then quickly make the guilty party disgorge. Was there a man in the whole district who who did not live in fear of him and of his might?

The next morning five more dollars had gone. Yet the domicile of Lien-ching remained calm. No neighbor heard a woman's wail nor the sharp whirr of a bamboo stick—as had been detected years before, while the master of the house was first engaged in bending the wife of his bosom to his will.

The evening following the loss, Lien-ching announced that he was leaving for one of his outlying farms. He made his preparations in a thorough and matter-of-fact manner, calculated to lull his wife's suspicions. He spent an exceedingly uncomfortable night in his own gatehouse—to the mystification of his porter, for he offered no explanation.

He was rewarded by the vision of his wife creeping from the house at dawn. He followed her. She went to the temple of Kuan Yin. There, at the doorway, Lien-ching saw her offer the old priest a small paper tied bundle. The latter demurred a moment, but the woman's voice shrilled out with such passionate entreaty that Tsung shrugged his shoulders and accepted the parcel. It clinked in the swift passage of hands.

Before, when the money had been lost, Lien-ching had been angry. Now, at the sight of the precious silver going to the priest, Tsung, the money lender, was overwhelmed by such a blackness of rage that he shook as in a chill. The very foundations of his universe seemed to be toppling. Only the most rudimentary sense of caution restrained him from rushing in and, with his bare hands, strangling this man who had gone back into the shrine bearing *his*—Lien-ching's—money.

LIEN-CHING kept such a strict watch the night following that no money disappeared. He thought of moving his silver out of the desk. But where could he secret it? Sooner or later his wife must find the hiding place. No; better to keep the money in the open this way and guard it.

The third evening a desire for sleep overweighed even cupidity and anger. His head fell forward exhaustedly as he sat at his desk. He slept heavily until dawn, in spite of his cramped position. When he awakened, Lien-ching's first act was to count his money. After this was done he began to shake in a second chill, and his face congested. A double theft, of ten dollars this time, came to light.

His resolve—to say nothing to his wife and to interpose no active curb—was badly shaken. He was able only to bolster it with a grim plan that had begun to form, by which he would not only regain his money but would mete out signal revenge.

Once the scheme had taken substance, Lien-ching set about immediately to execute it. Ordering a carrying chair, he departed for the village. He halted at the chemist's shop—his, now, by virtue of a foreclosed mortgage. In his generosity he suffered the chemist to live on there, paying the man a mere pittance. The financier's generosity was prompted by the thought that possibly he might need the services of the chemist should his son ever fall ill in the passage of the Thirty Perilous Barriers of childhood.

Complaining casually of sleeplessness, Lien-ching ordered a powerful morphia compound, introduced of late from the Land of the Rising Sun and beginning to vie with opium in the number of its addicts throughout this unhappy region.

The chemist concealed a smile of intense satisfaction, as he handed the white powders to the man whose tight fist grappled him body and soul. Perhaps now the grip would begin to loosen.

Lien-ching got into his chair and was borne to the baker's. As he entered this shop he thought he espied his wife in the distance. Before he could make sure, the figure dodged hurriedly into an alleyway not far from the chemist's.

The speculation on this unusual action of his wife occupied the mind of the money lender but a moment. His purpose was growing too urgent. He must stop this temptation to steal from him. Why, he told himself furiously, in a year's time the priest and his wife would beggar him. He shuddered. Dimly he sensed the miasma of hatred against him that arose on all sides. He knew that he would receive little mercy from these people, were he to be reduced to their level. They were ungrateful. No, he must hold his power over them.

At the baker's he bought four offertory cakes, the pattern that was placed before the images of the gods.

Returning home, Lien-ching told the gateman curtly that he would not give audience to the crowd which had been waiting patiently, despairingly, at his outer doors.

He shut himself in his bedroom and turned the lock. There, he slit open one of the cakes. With fingers that shook slightly, he dropped into the aperture one of the powders and lightly kneaded the half baked dough together again. He followed this with a second cake and a second powder. A third and a fourth.

One of these doped cakes would not kill the priest, Lien-ching whispered to himself. No, nor even two. Probably they would make the man ill. So ill that Tsung would understand the significance of it all. The priest would never reach the third and fourth cakes. Of course, if Tsung were very hungry and bolted them all in a hurry—after they had remained the customary three days at the altar . . . Well, Lien-ching could not help that. He certainly would not accuse himself of murder should a gormandizing priest be guilty of overeating. It was not *his* intention, he told himself hurriedly, that the holy man should consume all four cakes.

The task completed, Lien-ching set out on foot for the temple. He bore with him the four round, doughlike cakes. Tsung was wielding a short handled broom in the outer courtyard when the financier entered. He straightened his aged back with an effort and gave Lien-ching greeting:

"It is long, sir, since you have come to the shrine of the goddess who so greatly befriended you. You are welcome."

"I thank you," replied the money lender affably. "And I am here to bring a small offering to the divine Kuan Yin, these cakes. Also, a bit of silver." He pressed a dollar into the priest's hand.

The guardian of the temple accepted these gifts without warmth. Nevertheless, he laid the four cakes on the well scoured altar table, and dropped the money in the offertory box. Lien-ching watched covertly the disposal of the cakes.

Gazing down at the two men stood the Lady of Everlasting Mercy, Kuan Yin, the goddess who had given up eternal paradise in order to accept countless rebirths and thus be able to aid an erring world along the Way—immaculate *bodhisa* yet, through her bounty, able to give to childless women the boon of fecundity.

The image was carved of Yünnan cedar, lacquered and thinly gilded. In her hands she bore the Willow Branch and the Vase of Heavenly Dew. About her feet were carved sprawling, round-bellied, cherubic babies. She was faintly smiling, eyes half closed, as if in pitying amusement at the human comedy ceaselessly played before her.

LIEN-CHING went home to wait. The hours moved past at such a slow jog that this waiting became an oppressive matter. Even the act of counting his silver, or going over his ever increasing list of foreclosures, failed to bring his wonted solace.

Now, for the first time, he became terrifyingly aware of the flaws in his scheme. Perhaps the priest—recovering from his illness—would not realize that the poison had been sent as a warning. Perhaps, therefore, the thefts would continue undeterred, with Tsung threatening or cajoling his wife.

On the other side of the picture: What if the priest died? There was a possibility that the chemist, putting two and two together, might inform the local police. At the thought, Lien-ching became genuinely frightened. Remorse, also, a hitherto unknown sensation in his ruthlessly well ordered life, assailed him.

And superstition. After all, the goddess Kuan Yin *might* have aided in the gift of his precious son.

By noon of the fourth day, hearing nothing, Lien-ching could stand the suspense no longer. He decided that he would go over to the temple to see. In fact, if the cakes were not yet eaten, he would forego his revenge by demanding their return in order to destroy them.

He called to his wife, to tell her that he would be away for a short while. No answer. He called his son, but neither was the boy in the house. Shrugging his shoulders, Lien-ching went off at a brisk walk toward the shrine.

As he neared the temple courtyard, he espied a woman at the gate. As soon as she recognized him, she broke into loud sobs. Lien-ching ran forward. It was his wife.

"What is it?" he asked roughly. Fear gibbered at his elbow. "Has anything happened to—to the boy? Is my son all right? Oh, you fool, can't you tell me?"

"Our son is—dead! You murderer! You have killed him!"

Lien-ching thrust past her and into the half lighted room of the faintly smiling, imperturbable goddess. A wisp of incense rose, gray blue and tenuous. Tsung was bending over a small, slender form, lying on the floor before the image. In one hand, the boy clutched a bit of cake. On the altar rested a lone piece of bedaubed dough.

The unconnected thought shot searingly across Lien-ching's mind. Three of

the cakes were gone; it was a sentence of death.

The priest turned a grave impassive face to the financier.

"You have killed your son. The poison meant for me . . ."

Suddenly Lien-ching sank with a moan before Kuan Yin. He knocked his head repeatedly on the stone flagging.

"All—I will give all, O Compassionate One, if you will but restore my son!"

A woman's voice, yet harsh as iron, sounded at his elbow:

"Do you think the goddess will heed *your* promises? You, who have already given and forsworn a dozen? She has shown her wrath and made you its instrument, you murderer!"

It was a new manifestation of his wife, a being grown suddenly terrible and without pity. Lien-ching shivered and hid his face in his shaking hands.

Again he turned to the deity, whose compassion was said to rise above all mortal error. His voice was jerky with hysteria:

"This time, I *will* give! Bring me ink, and paper. I shall write it down, that all men may read. Twenty-five thousand taels—it is a quarter of my fortune—if you will but listen, O merciful Kuan Yin!"

"Only a quarter? Only twenty-five thousand taels?" came the flintlike voice of his wife.

"Two-thirds, then. I'll give it—all!" he answered frenziedly.

Quietly, without undue haste, the priest brought the ink stone, brush, and tiny stick of compressed ink. Slowly he mixed the ink, dipped the brush in it, handed brush and paper to the financier.

With hands which shook so that the ideographs were nearly illegible, Lien-ching began to make over mortgages and factories and money to the temple.

"Not all!" interrupted Tsung. "Only a tenth. You would have beggared the goddess. Yet she would not wish to beggar you."

The priest's voice was coldly grave. His faded eyes were remote and as expressionless as the images of the smaller *lohans* that were grouped in long rows behind the *p'usa*.

"Now, go back to your home. I shall intercede with the *bodhisat*. If your wish is to be granted, I shall bring back your son tomorrow. If she lends a deaf ear to your plea, I shall return this bit of futile paper and you will have the remainder of your life to contemplate its worthlessness."

AFTER Lien-ching had departed, his body swaying, his face grown old and immeasurably weary, the mother bent with crooning cries over the body of her son. The priest stood near by.

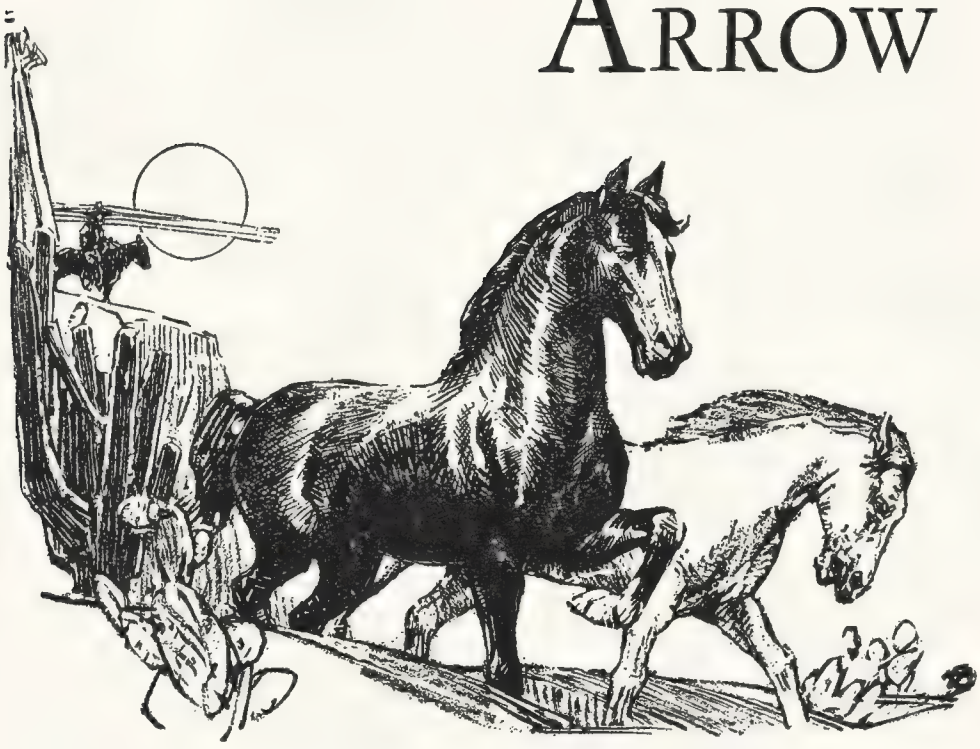
"What if the chemist was wrong?" she muttered. "He told me a single powder, when one was unused to taking it, would cause but a temporary illness. He didn't say anything about its making my boy's heart stop beating. This—this resembles death too closely!" Then, lifting her head, she faced the image. "O holy Kuan Yin, even though my husband did not keep his promises, *I* am paying now. Oh, I am paying in full!"

"Be patient," counseled the aged priest. "My heart tells me that the *p'usa* will not lend a deaf ear to your plea. She has ever shown compassion and has heard the cries of suffering motherhood." He fell silent a moment and then went on, "Yours was a brave and bold stroke. Yes, it took courage to give your son that piece of poisoned cake. As for this bit of paper—" he gazed somberly at the writing signed with Lien-ching's girdle seal—"it shall not be used to gild the image. It shall go—dollar for dollar—to relieve starvation, to bring a small measure of happiness to a hundred homes. No! Such a sacrifice as yours can not be in vain!"

As if in answer to his words, the boy stirred slightly. In the quiet room, a moaning sigh from his pale lips gave promise of pain, but of life renewed.

By RALPH HUBERT JOHNSTON

The RED ARROW



A Story of an Indomitable Man and an Unconquerable Stallion

"HIS NAME'S Lamb, and he don't object none to being saddled," volunteered one of the half dozen cowpunchers climbing to perch on the top bar of the corral.

Lew Wells looked up from the buckskin with the gentle brown eye and the glass eye and the scarred side, and his gaze came to rest on Melissa Kessler, who sat on the rail watching Red MacLane come through the corral gate with his saddle on his shoulder. Lew decided she was about eighteen, and very desirable, if a man liked fire.

As the LK rider had said, Lamb did not object to being saddled. He merely watched Red with a sad look in that gentle eye, as if Lew were not there. And as he dropped the stirrup and led the buckskin from the snubbing post, Red's own eyes were a strange intense blue glitter. Lew sprang for the rail.

"He's going over," somebody shouted.

There was a brief thunder in the corral, forefeet pawing at the sky. Swift as a cat

the buckskin was on his feet and whirling toward the red headed man. But Red was on his feet also, and the two circled each other warily. Again Red mounted. A cloud of dust enveloped horse and man, out of which those on the fence saw a lunging plunging demon smash itself against a panel of the corral. The girl's clear voice cried sharply, and the man next Lew jerked up a revolver. Lew reached out a long arm and pushed its muzzle down, then dropped from the rail into the corral, his heavy quirt swinging from his wrist. Dust was settling in little eddies and, in a silence that pounded on the eardrums, the buckskin viciously circled Red, who stood in a queer way on one foot and hitched himself awkwardly to face the snake-like head. Lew ran in between them.

The red headed cowpuncher then sat in the dust of the corral, his face pale through its tan, and a white haired, straight man was saying—

"Stranger, I'm Dan Kessler, and I want a rider like you bad enough to offer you the job of foreman."

The girl cried reproachfully—

"Dad, his leg is broken!"

"Of course it is, girl; and he rode that son-of-a-gun straight up."

"Men!" she said, giving the word as an explanation of masculine shortcomings. "But admiring won't heal broken bones." She pointed at three of the cowpunchers. "Billy, bring a blanket, and you men carry him to the house. He'll need a doctor, too."

Red remarked, to no one in particular—

"Take me to the bunkhouse."

"Take him to the house," repeated Melissa.

As the blanket was dropped beside him, Red's voice came thin and knifelike—

"You *hombres* are taking orders from the foreman."

His eyes were so none but the girl would meet them, and two small fires burned in her black ones. A little wind tugged at strands of her cloudy hair, and her face, of that peculiar ivory the sun can not tan, was slightly flushed.

"You," she said shortly, "are bad tempered because your leg hurts; but sick folks take orders—not give them." She motioned and they put Red on the blanket and carried him toward the house.

Lew had stood by and said nothing. He thought Red plain crazy to object to being taken into a house such as this, a two story structure with wide porches, big windows and lace curtains, which he could see from where he stood. He pushed his hat back and rubbed his blond hair. He knew Red, and he realized the three LK riders did not. Glancing at Dan Kessler, Lew saw him looking after Melissa with the sort of smile that made it clear who was important on the LK. So he shrugged philosophically, and a voice drawled—

"Needn't worry none, stranger; he'll be plumb gentled in a day or so."

"It's kind of plain," said Lew, "that you folks don't know Red."

"And it's evident you don't know Meliss'," the other answered.

He sat on his heels against the corral and twisted a cigaret and said pleasantly:

"I'm called Zeke when it's nothing worse. Been quite awhile a-coming, ain't you? No broncs left in Texas?"

Lew looked at him queerly.

"New Mexico, and they did seem to be getting scarce. Just how'd you know? I'd like to learn."

"Well," Zeke drawled, "it's a kind of gift, you might say; only I heard your pardner say 'hawss' and he set in his saddle like they do down there, not so loose-like; and I knew a man once before with that look in his eyes when he was a-saddling a bronc. He was busted up considerable, but he always got well till the thirteenth one jumped on him."

Nothing changed to the eye, except that the ashes from Lew's cigaret sifted to his knee and burned unnoticed into the leather of his chaps. He spoke slowly:

"We been trailin' together kind of close for quite a while, since a black mare in Arizona. She'd killed two men. She was

Red's sixth, and then there was a couple in Texas and in Utah and New Mexico and so on. Some *hombre* was a-talking loose about this buckskin Lamb in a saloon in Guadalupe just when I had Red talked into the notion of going in with me on a ranch on the Pecos River. No matter; I'd probably get tired of one place.

"On our way here, south a piece, we run into a big red stallion. He went away from us like smoke in a high wind. Now I ain't what you'd call superstitious. Red had that look, and he says:

" 'There's the one I been lookin' for, Lew. He'll be my last.'

"I'm not a-talking about just plain horse breaking; it's the ones with bad names. That red one will be his thirteenth."

WHEN Lew visited Red, which he did every day, he found him in comfort in a wide bed with white sheets. There were carpets on the floor of his room. And once Melissa brought a tray with Red's dinner while Lew was there; dishes of thin china, a napkin in a silver ring, and even a little vase with flowers.

"And I'll be back," she told the invalid, "to read to you again, whether you pretend to be asleep or not. Moreover, the next time you cuss Lee Sing so the poor thing goes out in the kitchen and talks to himself in Chinese all day, I'll get a couple of horny handed cowpunchers to be your nurses."

Lew agreed with her that Red was a wretch. The door closed behind her, and it seemed to Lew that Red was gazing out the window as if he were seeing something pleasant.

"He's called Red Arrow," said the red headed man.

Lew's thoughts were lost, having to do with black eyes, and after a moment Red turned his head and looked at him.

"That red horse," he added, and Lew saw that his eyes had a glint instead of a light.

So it was Lew came to have a kind of pity for the dark eyed girl, seeing her accompanying Red by and by when he could hobble with crutch and cane out to the breaking corral, where he had had Lamb put again. There he would sit silent on the top rail, until Melissa would finally find no more to say, and go quietly away. Dan Kessler found that he knew cattle.

"He's a cowman," he said to his daughter. "A good one; just what I need."

Melissa looked at him strangely.

"It's only the buckskin and Red Arrow that hold him. When he has broken them, he'll be gone, like a wind that stops blowing."

"I've known of several men trying to ketch the red horse," said Old Dan thoughtfully. "He's been out there quite a while." He added after a moment, "He's not finished with Lamb yet, either."

But he was very shortly finished with Lamb when again he was ready to mount, which he did while yet, as Lew and Old Dan informed him, the knit bone was ready for no such tremendous strain. Red went on tying his spur rowels in an odd manner, so they could not jingle. Lew waited for no answer; he knew Red, but he rode his own horse into the corral. And Lamb, moving with the guarded step of a cat, made no rebellion against the red headed man with the cold eyes.

"It's the spurs he don't take to," Red said. "I noticed when one of you *hombres*'d walk by he didn't like the jingle. Likely has something to do with the scar on his side."

Zeke drawled from the top rail:

"I'll take your word for it. I don't mind a cayuse what shows a dislike for me, but I don't care about one that wants to kind of do a *post mortem* on the remains."

It appeared that there would be one horse on the LK which none but Red would ride, at least until the afternoon when, as he came from the blacksmith shop across the wide yard from the corral, Red saw its gate open. He moved incuriously to see who had gathered

courage to try the Lamb. Then he said—

"I'll be damned!"

Swiftly he crossed into the corral. There he caught Melissa, who made no struggle, in his arms, carried her to the gate and set her down outside. She jerked away from him then, and her face was pale with fury.

"You're a common cowpuncher," she gasped, eyes blazing darkly. Red stood with his back to the corral gate. He folded his arms and a slow sardonic smile crossed his face. "A kind of servant," she added. "I hate you! Don't ever dare speak to me again!"

He still stood there and watched her go away, her stiff back impressing on him the fact that he was less than the dust. Once he started back into the corral, and stopped uncertainly and gazed toward the ranch-house again. Presently he took her saddle from the buckskin's wethers. Later still he found Dan Kessler and the Lamb became his personal property.

So he lost her, for Melissa went to her Aunt Emily in Philadelphia, to the satisfaction of that lady, who considered a cattle ranch a crude and horrid outpost of civilization. And sometimes Red paused near the gate of the breaking corral uncertainly, as a man returns to the place where he has been on the brink of a beautiful thought.

In the moments Red found to spare, which were not many, as Old Dan seemed to find it necessary to go East on business frequently—as a matter of fact, he traveled to and fro between his home and his heart, a forlorn wayfarer—he trailed the red stallion. From an Indian he met on the hills one day Red bought a faint title to Red Arrow, and learned he was an evil spirit that eluded pursuit by fleeing in the valley of the Evil One, where others must creep. And a saddle horse broke a leg with him in a fall another time. He gazed for a long time at the tumbled lava beds, and of Zeke, who sat his horse nearby, he asked—

"This the valley of the Evil One?"

"It sure is," replied Zeke, and grinned a little. "I reckon you been buying Sam Greasefoot's claim again. Two, three fellers has, but they never collected their property. That Arrow always fetches a circle and gets in here, like a mountain sheep on the rocks."

"A relay," suggested Red.

"It's been tried. Nobody ever ketched him out where they could keep him from getting back."

Then Red relieved the injured horse of its suffering, and Zeke saw his eyes were glinting, strange and cold.

So summer and fall passed, and winter laid its white cope over the hills and deserts. Stock grew lean, digging for scant forage through the snow; and Red became more silent and withdrawn, so that Lew and Zeke, the irrepressible, were all of the men who were in any degree familiar with him.

At last spring came with the chinook. Wearisome leisure was exchanged for dawn to dark work, spring roundup. And when finally bed and chuck wagons rolled back into the LK, Melissa was there, a year older—only a year older.

BUT NOT any more was she the same Melissa. This girl was hard with the brilliance of the East; and two men and a woman were with her. These exhibited well bred curiosity, dressed in what Zeke called "fancy ridin' pants." And they snubbed that friendly soul royally. In the bunkhouse Zeke remarked bleakly—

"If they call me a cow person without kind of smiling, I'm a-going to get real violent-like." Cowpunchers are pioneers; and as such, are proud.

The two men—their names were Hunter and Milford, of the Philadelphia Hunters and Milfords—had one object in being there, which was Melissa, who smiled impartially and walked on between Hunter and Milford the first time she met Red face to face in the big yard.

Old Dan had acquired the first automobile on the range of the Little Indian River, a big scarlet machine with brass levers on the side.

"It's about as good as a horse on a level road," commented Zeke. "Even got a rubber bag you can punch and make it bray."

But horseback riding furnished the chief diversion, though often the woman chose a rocking chair on the deep porch. Such was Billy the wrangler's understanding one morning, and it was a relief to him as half the saddle horses had eluded him in the dawn. The big gray which Hunter had chosen for himself was one of these, so Billy saddled the old cowhorse given the woman when she rode and left him with two others at the hitching rail.

Presently Red came from the combined office and bunkroom which, as foreman, he occupied alone, and roped the one horse left in the corral, and leading him out, commenced to saddle him. Back of Red a voice cut through a musical pounding from the blacksmith shop like a whip cracking—

"Look here, my man, I'll have a horse prepared immediately."

Red made a neat hitch in his latigo, dropped the stirrup and turned. Hunter's eyes were coldly annoyed at the trouble he was put to. Being a large man with a biting tongue, his eyes were accustomed to seeing others fall before them. Red's gaze traveled unhurriedly down the length of his close fitting trousers, down the polished boots and hesitated on the tiny spurs. The horse behind him was a buckskin with a gentle brown eye. Red stepped aside, a smile on his lips, and his eyes locked briefly with Hunter's. From where she approached with Milford and the woman, Melissa suddenly called out sharply; but Hunter's face was burning pink and he was muttering angrily. He spurred Lamb viciously as a result of his temper. Something like an explosion went off under his saddle. The dust drifted away and Hunter began rather doubtfully to try his limbs. Zeke retreated into the shop and lay down behind the forge and seemed to go into spasms; and Melissa said to herself:

"I believe the red headed devil is jealous. How I hate him!" Her eyes smouldered; and from the face of Hunter as he looked after Red, who was riding Lamb away, all semblance of civilization was momentarily stripped.

But perhaps more did come of it, for the Eastern woman, who seemed to have suffered more than Hunter, did not ride out with the three. And as they rode that day, the two, who had often enough entreated her separately, together pressed Melissa for a choice between them, She laughed.

"I don't know," she said. "I haven't decided how to judge between you. You came out here to see if my ancestral estates made me worthy to be a Milford or a Hunter—what I have besides what I am."

Milford, a smallish man, objected.

"That, now, is a hard thing to say, you know. One has to discriminate."

Hunter stared at him and would have spoken but Melissa went on:

"Out here we're more likely to judge a man by what he can do beside what he is. I don't know—" She had stopped abruptly, and suddenly she laughed again, a queer reckless laugh. "There's a big red stallion in these hills," she said.

When they dismounted at the hitching rail that evening a horse was being shod before the shop, and the acrid tang of burning horn rose from the fitting of a hot shoe. Milford was speaking in his empty harmless way, a little as if prompted:

"Do you want the beast alive? One could shoot him if one couldn't catch him."

And Melissa's voice was higher than usual when she answered.

"What use would I have for a dead Red Arrow? And the man that brings him to me is the man I'll marry."

"By Jove," said Hunter, and he certainly was not prompted, "I've done a bit of shooting. I've heard you can stun a horse by hitting him on the neck."

In the shop Zeke laid down his tools one by one, as if he feared something would break; and then he picked them up again

before he looked toward the red headed man in the doorway, whose face was as expressionless as stone, but whose eyes glinted as though with cold fire.

AT FIRST Red acted as a man who seems to doubt the reality of what he has heard. Melissa had looked full at him there in the door of the shop, and her look was mockery, was taunting, was daring. But he had done nothing, at first; and when he did act, the manner of it all caused the Eastern woman to hint that Melissa's behavior had been unconventional, if not in bad taste. Her answer was a smile so bitter that she said no more, for Melissa understood that Red had made no move until he knew that Hunter actually meant to stalk Red Arrow with a rifle. But alone in her room she was a frightened girl who prayed the two would not meet.

Lew Wells leaned against the corral rails in the curious posture of a man bracing a great weight, his boot heels sunk in the ground, the wide brim of his hat pulled low over his eyes. Zeke came casually up to him, leading a bay horse by the reins. He spoke as if continuing a conversation:

"Slim and Ike'll take the little feller for a nice long ride, but Hunter wouldn't be fooled. He picks him out a couple of Mex horse thieves and that Injun, Sam Greasefoot, like he sure knowed the smell of that kind."

Zeke had learned to drive the scarlet car and, at Hunter's request to be taken into Bellan City, had been sent by Old Dan for that purpose.

In the same tone in which he might have commented upon the weather, Lew said:

"Red's gone too. About noon. I was kind of waiting for him, knowing him. He was in the bunkroom writing in a book, and all at once he laid his pencil down, like he had just happened to think of something, and he pulled on his chaps. That was all. As if he was just a-going to ride down to the pasture maybe, excepting he buckled his gun on.

"Well, he saw me a-fixing to go too, and he shook his damn' red head at me.

" 'No,' he says, 'this has kind of got complications that make it a one man job, Lew.'

"He was saddling that worthless buckskin. The horse he came here on is mine and a good one, and he knowed he could have it. But it ain't any use to argue with Red. And the damn'— Well, he says, 'I won't be coming back without him, Lew.'

"I ain't superstitious, but I sure wish I was with him. He's so doggone reckless-like."

Zeke appeared to be listening to the playing of a mouth organ—"Katie Wells."

"It's funny," he said, "the twists in folks. Like Old Dan said, whatever we could do outside, we can't change what's going on underneath this. Meliss' meant something else entire . . ."

Lew nodded.

"Red will go on," he said, "if he gets the red horse. Since you speak of it—I've seen women want him before. It's like he's looking for something. I don't know what it is. I don't figure he does, either."

It was a bitter pride in Red, and a hatred that puzzled him with its fury. He was accustomed to having a reason for his emotions, and outside of the man's disagreeableness, for which it would be out of proportion, he could see no reason to hate Hunter. Perhaps the girl . . .

"No," Red said to the buckskin as he saddled, having slept that first night in a grassy coulee. "No, I don't love the girl; I've seen prettier women and gentler women and—if I love at all, it's this."

He looked about at the flats of the foothills, at the vast sagebrush desert rolling away to where the sun was coming up over the edge of the earth, and at the mountains, purple and brooding darkly in spots the sun had not yet reached.

He headed into the mountains toward a waterhole on the range frequented by Red Arrow. And as he rode he considered the fact that the food in his roll was half gone. He need not starve; there

were rabbits, and for that matter there was beef. The .45 in his holster could serve him if necessary. But, besides this, he rode Lamb, because the buckskin alone chanced to be his own. And Lamb was not a good rope horse. He was stubborn and dangerous.

"That's another thing I got against this Hunter man," Red said, lost in his thoughts as the buckskin climbed a boulder strewn ridge. He noticed Lamb prick his ears down the mountain. Something ricochetted from the rocks at his side with a thin whine, and a report echoed in the cañon.

Instantly he was down and crouched behind a big boulder.

"A rifle," he commented. "Out of my range. You'll learn maybe to look where you're a-going, Red. Two of them," he added as another report of a different caliber sounded.

Then Lamb jumped and scrambled, and he knew the shot was aimed at his mount. A sort of madness came upon him. He sprang up, throwing futile shots down the mountainside. The rim of his hat was twitched by invisible fingers. He laughed, a wild reckless laugh that was more like a war cry, dropped the .45 and suddenly put his shoulder to the boulder he had crouched behind. Red was a powerful man. His back bowed and his muscles cracked. Slowly—slowly the boulder moved. The blue shirt was jerked at his shoulder, and a dark stain spread slowly.

Far down the slope four men were grouped. Two were on their knees methodically firing rifles. Beyond them and to the side, near a growth of buckbrush, were their horses. Suddenly one of them turned and got away like a runner from his mark—Sam Greasefoot, Red thought, because he knew those mountains. The others saw only a rolling boulder. Then it leaped in the air, and came down with terrific impact on a larger stone. It seemed as if the mountain became fluid at Red's feet. A roar like the rolling of a mighty tide filled his ears. He saw the three men, dwarfed all at once, tardily following the Indian before a great cloud of dust curtained them.

WHEN he turned, Lamb stood at a little distance, quite still but trembling nervously. He found no mark on the buckskin until he was mounting; after leading the horse out of what seemed dangerous ground, he came on a raw groove across the saddle seat. Red's own wound was merely a rather painful flesh cut.

Presently as he rode downward watchfully, he saw that the slide had stopped in a dish-like hollow at the head of what farther on became a cañon. Two men were clinging to brush at the margin of this hollow. One was Hunter, he could see. The Indian was far down the cañon.

"One of them," said Red, "is a good Mex now." He could see their horses running higher up. "Providence is working here," he added suddenly, and set Lamb running along the ridge.

It was easy to overtake the runaway horses, whose dragging reins and ropes hampered them.

After he had caught and freed them of saddle, bridle and halter, excepting one carrying a pack, whose lead rope he retained, Red sat for a time looking back to where three tiny figures were crawling up out of a cañon.

"Let it be a lesson to you," he said softly, "to learn to shoot straight before you go a-shooting up hill again."

There was a good deal of satisfaction in the thought of the thirty-odd miles of tramping back to the LK which lay before them . . .

Late in the afternoon Red sighted the wild horse, and with him a small white mare. Time was when Red Arrow had headed a band, varying from ten to thirty members. These, the fittest two, were the survivors. As they drifted off it came to him then what his only course could be: simply to follow and follow and wait with unchanging patience for the chance which must come. A contest of endurance! The doubtful qualities of the buckskin against the iron and the cun-

ning and the fighting heart of the great red stallion, who ran without effort, relentlessly, his splendid head slightly turned, black mane a-float.

The second night Red hobbled the buckskin and packhorse in the dry creek bed of a cañon along which ran a thin strip of dried grass. He was wondering about the packhorse, since that animal was a drag on Lamb. Then as burning suns and broken trails, the climbing of rockbound buttes and pitching descents without end, went on, it became clear the stallion was making a great circle. So at intervals Red *cached* portions of the pack under cairns of stone, with the hope that if he passed again it would be before the rats had cleaned them out.

On the fifth day he loosed the packhorse and threw away his slicker and chaps and coffee pot, keeping only a small amount of biscuit and bacon, and a canvas waterbag. Thereafter he closed the distance between himself and Red Arrow, keeping him from the waterholes when possible. He moistened Lamb's nostrils and mouth when there was no waterhole. By then they were in the desert, not a desert of sand, but of rock and scrubby sage and lonely buttes and dry cañons.

The man hardly knew when he first became aware that Lamb was going on steadily, untiring, without urging. It was as if the buckskin had taken up the gauntlet of the stallion's challenge. It began to dawn upon Red that through the chance of his pride he had ridden out on the one horse capable of matching mile for mile with Red Arrow, until the end.

At last they were down to a dogged trot, the white mare with hanging head, the stallion at her flank driving her to hold the distance; and always the figure creeping nearer on the trail. Red Arrow was not afraid while he could see the man, but if Red seemed to take too long to come around a butte or up from a washout, the Arrow grew wary, testing the wind, as if he feared the horse and rider might in some mysterious manner appear close at hand. With satanic ferocity he drove the little mare in desperate leaps in the dry cañons, his great quarters lifting him like catapults through the air.

There came a night when Red, who had lost all count of days; who, in fact, seemed at times to float through the air apart from himself, watching with detached curiosity the gaunt man and horse who went on day after day, tied Lamb instead of hobbling him, for there was no grass. He gave the buckskin the last of the water, pouring it into his hat for the horse. He had shot a rabbit and he broiled it, holding it over his fire. It was dry eating, but he slept heavily in spite of the coarse repast.

In the first light of dawn he saddled Lamb, who stood with drooping head, but went on again without urging. The Arrow had traveled far in the night, evidently worried by the little mare's weakness. It was not until a brazen sun had rolled high that Red heard from far ahead a high neigh, like a cry. And presently Lamb was stepping slowly with his nose low in a stretch of black rock that was like a storm tossed ocean petrified, swells and sharp combers laced with cracks and great fissures. The valley of the Evil One. A hopelessness assailed Red and he loosed the reins, giving the buckskin his choice of turning or proceeding ahead.

PRESENTLY he wondered if he might be a bit mad, for quite clearly he saw the Arrow coming toward him. Then the stallion saw him and stopped short and whistled, and Red caught a glimpse of white in a little hollow, and knew the mare was down, exhausted. Silently then the Arrow wheeled and left her, leaping goat-like with the sure footedness peculiarly his.

Sometimes Red forgot where he was that day. He was unaware when the lava was left behind. Once a high sound, like an echo, came from far back, and once it seemed as if the stallion were close at hand. Suddenly eager, he leaned forward, pawing at his rope, and spurred Lamb. At once he knew he was riding as he had never ridden before, high on a

ridge, on a buckskin gone berserk. But it could not last; sheer exhaustion halted Lamb, his legs spread like those of a sawhorse, his ears back, breathing in great sobs. Red thought he sprang off—in reality he crawled, and sat on a boulder until he could steady himself to use his gun on Lamb.

But after he had sat there a time, something happened in Red's mind. Solemnly he bent and unbuckled his spurs—his salute to an unbending spirit. Going quietly to Lamb, he remounted and automatically they turned toward the dot of swirling dust which curled down the cañon. He had scarcely known he was in the hills again.

Hours dragged like eternities under the sky and its ball of burning brass. And at last Red saw the Arrow turning uncertainly here and there, and knew the stallion had found a waterhole dry. When he went on, heading for another, Red pressed him, knowing the end was near. Lamb still could summon speed from his stubborn heart; the gait pursuer and pursued attained being a dogged trot, and the Arrow's proud crest was low.

After all, it ended quickly. Lamb turned eagerly into a grove of quaking aspen, so that Red knew there was water. The Arrow was there, his sides heaving and streaked with mud and sweat, bogged down in black sand, too spent to break away. Red tossed his rope over the black maned head, and lay down with his face in the water, then drew Lamb away lest he drink too much. They needed rest, for presently the Arrow would surge free . . . For some reason Red avoided looking at his silent captive.

So he knew he hated her whose word had brought this thing to pass. True, he had sought to capture Red Arrow; but he knew that without the challenge which he had known she meant for him, he could not have gone a chase as bitter and as cruel. This was dust and ashes in his mouth, as, at times, are the achievements of all men who achieve alone; for a voice within him asked, "What of this now?"

And the wild white pain which came in his heart he thought was hate . . .

In the east the sky was turning silver when Billy the wrangler stumbled out, breathing maledictions upon alarm clocks, forever and amen. Starting into the breaking corral for a rope he thought he had left there, Billy stopped abruptly, peering at a still form, and swore reverently and backed discreetly out. Ten minutes later seven cowpunchers were perched along the top rail, and beautiful and defiant in the far corner the Arrow watched them. But the magic of freedom was gone from him.

"All the *hombres* that've chased him don't sound so many now," Lew Wells observed. "He ain't the Red Arrow, kind of, but just a big wild horse, and my pardner ketched him single handed."

In the adjoining corral a gaunt and ugly buckskin snorted softly in his hay, his back turned to the row of men. Many such rows perched on corral rails had he seen. They were as nothing.

Lee Sing banged the iron triangle, which meant, "come-and-get-it," and as the men started for the cook house, Lew added to Zeke—

"I'd sure like to know what happened at that landslide."

Hunter had said truthfully that a landslide had brought disaster to his party, which was a point for Hunter. The Indian and Mexican would say nothing further.

Later as they saddled horses, Lew glanced toward Red's blankly shut cabin door, and turned and saw Zeke watching him. He grinned a little.

"I ain't superstitious," he said, "but I'm sure glad to see him back."

As he pulled up on the latigo he heard Zeke say:

"I wasn't real certain till he came back. Now I know it's his thirteenth bronc." Lew turned to stare questioningly at him, but Zeke was riding away.

The LK lay still and empty, save for Lee Sing in his kitchen. Old Dan and Melissa had taken Hunter and Milford and the woman to Bellan City on their

way to the East a day or so earlier, and it was not until nearly noon of this day that the scarlet car throbbed dustily into the wide yard space. Melissa was out and starting for the house. Then suddenly she halted and turned and was running toward the breaking corral, her skirt billowing and close against her as though she faced a wind. Old Dan did not understand until the gate was open and Melissa was inside and the Arrow flashed out and then, being a wise man, he sat quietly watching Red come up behind Melissa as she stood looking after the running stallion.

Red had slept as he got to his bunk. The blue shirt was in shreds and under it his skin was visible in reddened strips. His face was lean and dark and hawklike under a young red beard, all the dross burned from it. When he spoke Melissa whirled.

"Girl," he said harshly. "Why did you let him go?"

With her face like a ghost for whiteness against the cloud of her hair, Melissa stared up at him.

"Red, I couldn't help it . . ."

Then her fingers were lightly against his chest, and she said gently—"Red, won't you ever see I'm making love to you?"

The wondering look of a man who has unexpectedly found that for which he has searched blindly long and long came upon Red's face. And the knowledge was born in him that never again would an achievement of his turn to dust and ashes.

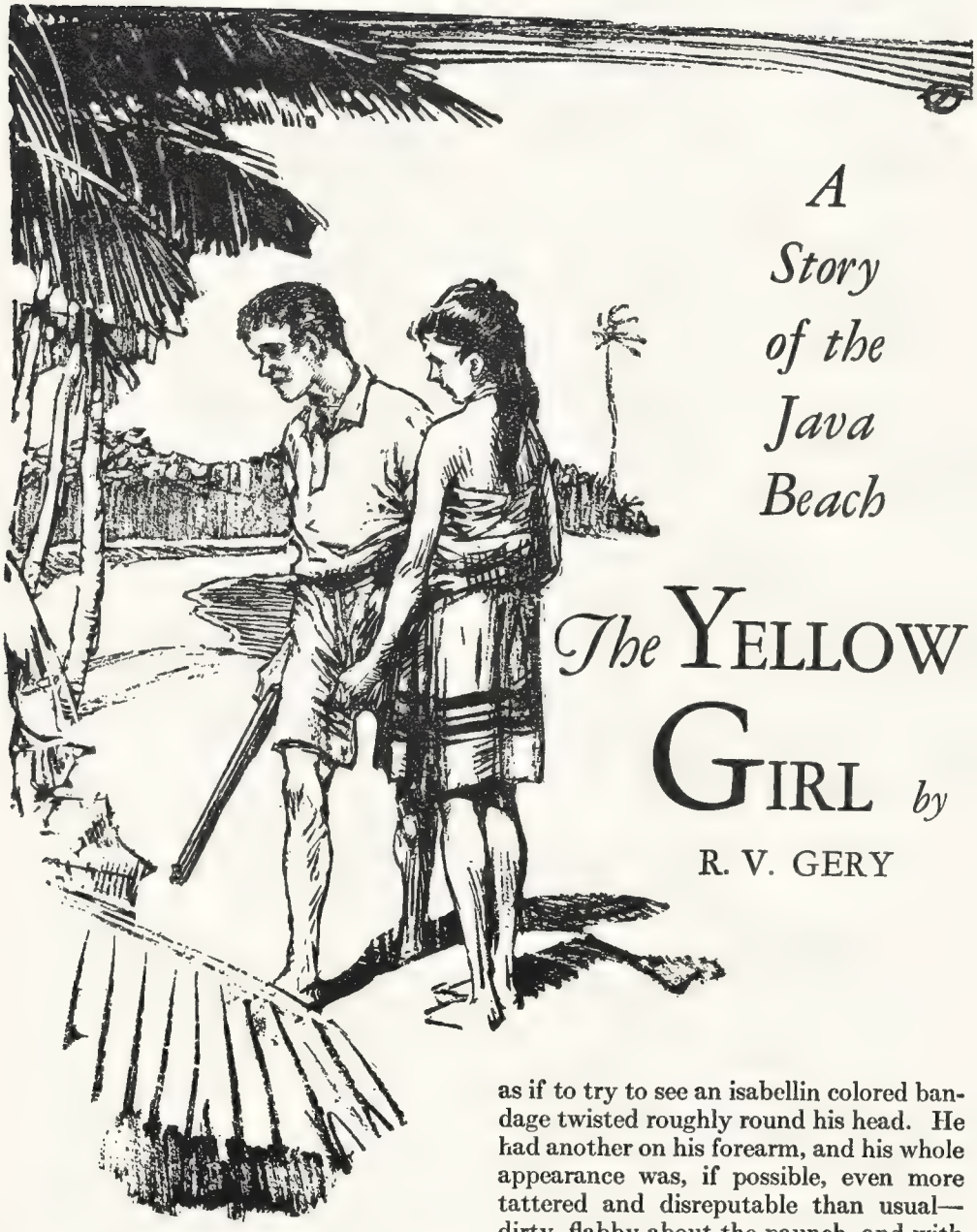
Old Dan abruptly climbed out of the scarlet car, turning his broad back, and marched toward the ranch-house.

THE BALTIMORE CHANDLER WHO SPITED THE SEA

By VICTOR WEYBRIGHT

WHEN clipper chandlers hung out signs for "steam"
And odds of lumber sold no more for spars—
When brassy boxes took the place of stars
Romantic traffic fled the harbor stream . . .
Soon noisy cobbles bore a Gypsy team,
A wagonload of eider and guitars,
And men indifferent to sailors' scars,
Laughing at hornpipes, sobering at a dream.

One failing chandler got a sawyer's bench
For catering to this Gypsy caravan;
He hewed from old ship timbers wagon wheels
As swift and blithesome as a Tzigan' wench . . .
Old sailors cursed that 'twas a chandler man
Stripped for the roads their salty decks and keels.



A Story of the Java Beach

The YELLOW GIRL *by*

R. V. GERY

GRIGGS rose from his battered deck chair and greeted me after his cockney fashion.

"Well, well!" he chuckled. "An 'oo'd 'ave thought to see you 'ere these days? Ain't yer ashamed to be seen about with me?"

He cocked an indescribable eye upward, as if to try to see an isabellin colored bandage twisted roughly round his head. He had another on his forearm, and his whole appearance was, if possible, even more tattered and disreputable than usual—dirty, flabby about the paunch, and with the shaking hands of the tropical drunkard; but his eyes were as cynically defiant as ever, and he looked at me with the indomitable grin of a terrier.

"Well," I said, "judging by what I heard up the coast, you do seem to have been a bit above yourself. What happened?"

He chuckled again, and deftly knocked the neck off my whisky bottle.

"Happened?" he said. "Remember that play actin' woman?"

"Julie La Plante?"

"That's 'er—gal old Hi Fat scared into the woods. Well, she escaped— She's a devil, too, that one!"

He paused for a swig at the bottle, and turned a leery eye on me.

"Go on!" I said.

He looked across the little glade with its glancing butterflies and the bright light off the sea to where Om-dong the yellow girl sat and played with her two fat babies. The venomous Griggs's affection for the three of them had always been an interesting sidelight on his character, and now his throaty voice was almost tender as he pointed to them.

"See 'er?" he said. "You'd never think it to look at 'er, but that yeller tom there's a little 'ero!"

Enthusiasm like this from Griggs was something sufficiently out of the way to make me wary of further questioning; he is not a person to be hurried, anyhow, when it comes to the recital of his more lurid adventures. And so, beyond noting that the diamond necklace, once the adornment of curtained queens in Rajputana, still flared round Om-dong's neck, I affected an elaborate detachment until his story should be forthcoming; although Van Tromp of the Hollander police in Sourabaya had hinted enough to me to make me desperately curious of what might have happened in that clearing since I had last seen the little cockney and heard from him the tale of Julie La Plante, Maxon, and the string of soapy, glittering stones . . .

"Remember old Four-Times-He?" Griggs began. "Dirty old dog, wasn't 'e? 'Im an' the Portugoose wasn't over particler about 'ow they did things, you'll rec'lect, and 'twasn't until I come along an' put a stopper to the two of 'em that we got what you might call civilized 'ereabouts.

"Then there was Maxon, an' a nasty swine 'e was, at that. Wanted me to *puckarow* the woman, 'e did, against me principles; I don't 'old with killin' women. Not but what it might 'ave been better if I 'ad . . ."

He broke off reminiscently to stare once more across the clearing toward the highly unorthodox little graveyard where slept the renegade English parson, Four-Times-He; De Sousa the Portuguese; Maxon, agent for Julie La Plante of the necklace—and, unless Van Tromp had deceived me . . .

"B'lieve me it ain't all jam, ownin' a string o' sparklers like them. At first, when I'd got Maxon out o' the way, an' the woman 'ad bolted off into the woods, why, I thinks to meself, now this 'ere's a little bit of all right. Only wait awhile, I says to meself, and we'll get across to Saigon or some place, an' market them beauties with parties what ain't too inquisitive . . . Remember me talkin' to you about it?

"Yus. A fat'ead, that's what I was; an' if it 'adn't been for Om-dong there. . .

"LET'S see—must 'ave been about a week after you was 'ere last; say three weeks or so after Julie went off into the woods on 'er pretty lonesome. An' what with conceitin' at meself for 'avin' done Master Maxon down, an' plottin' 'ow to turn the shiners into cash, an' maybe what with a shade too much of this 'ere ruination in the bottle, I s'pose I must 'ave been as easy a mark as there was in these seas. Didn't take no precautions, I mean, an' went round unarmed, an' slept sound at nights just as if I 'adn't a bloomin' wildcat loose in the woods an' sniffin' after me. I didn't know it, of course, but that's what she was—a bloomin' wildcat!"

Now Cornelius Van Tromp, who is the descendant of stolid admirals, is not easily moved from his Hollander calm; but he had used almost precisely the same words to me a day or so previously in reference to this very lady, met in the course of official duty. And it was as a direct consequence of his lurid account of her and her encounter with Griggs that I had

come scurrying down the coast in the *Kittiwake*, to get at first hand the details of the business.

"Between two an' three it was they got me," Griggs went on. "I reckon I must 'ave 'ad a drop or two more tiddley than was good for me, an' Om-dong, she was sleepin' too when they rushed us. First thing I knowed was a couple of 'em sittin' on me chest, and me feet an' hands tied. A feller lights the lamp.

" 'Good mornin', Mister Griggs!' 'e says. 'Let's 'ope we see you well!'

" 'E was a tall, black haired devil, very ragged to look at, and 'e 'ad a gun. Seemed to me 'e spoke a bit too good for the job 'e was on, and any'ow 'e was the boss of the other two that was there with 'im; easy to see that; they was niggers. 'E gives me a jab in the ribs, funny-like, with the muzzle of the gun.

" 'Wake up, Mister Griggs!' 'e says. 'Rise an' shine,' 'e says, 'if you compre-'end me. In other words, salute the 'appy morn—and then there's a little matter we 'ave to discuss with you.'

"'E sits on the foot of the bed an' waves the pistol at me, laughin' to beat all hell in a polite sort of way. Seemed to me I'd 'eard 'is kind of *bat* before some place, but I couldn't place it, not right away, and I played silly for time.

" 'Woddyer want?' I asks, stupid-like.

" 'Well,' says 'e, sarcastic, 'first, the pleasure of your comp'ny; second, that of 'your charmin'—er, wife; and thirdly, that string of stones. Just where are they, Griggs?'

" 'Stones?' I says. 'What stones? I ain't got no stones!'

" 'E reaches over an' digs me 'ard in the ribs with the pistol muzzle.

" 'Just a little reminder,' 'e says, 'that you're not dealin' with Maxon now. Next time it'll be the bullet, Griggs. Now—where are those stones?'

" 'Talk sense,' I says, ' 'ooever you may be. What's all this about stones?' And I looks 'im in the eye.

" 'H'm!' 'e says, 'arf to 'imself. 'That's the way of it, is it, me friend? Obstinate, eh?' And with that 'e turns round and says somethin' to some one outside in a lingo I don't understand.

"They come in, a couple of them, an' by the light of that smoky lamp I tell you they pretty near give me the 'orrors to look at 'em. Fellers out of the woods they was, naked and shinin' with oil or somethin', an' grinnin' like a couple of idols. One 'ad a charcoal brazier out of the kitchen, an' the other an old rifle barrel. No need to tell me what them meant!

"The big feller says somethin' to them, and they starts heatin' the barrel. Then 'e turns to me again.

" 'Mister Griggs,' 'e says, 'you'll observe these gentlemen and their present occupation. I needn't dwell upon it, I'm sure, with a man of your common sense. Now, where are those stones?'

"Funny thing, ain't it, 'ow one gets to feel sometimes? I don't s'pose there was a party in Asia more scared than 'Enery Griggs just then. Gawd, I c'n see the heat on them gun barrels now! Scared mostly out of my wits; an' yet I'll tell you what it was I was thinkin' about mainly.

" 'Om-dong's got that necklace,' was what I was thinkin' to meself, 'an' these 'ere devils ain't got 'er, from what I see. Means she's run off into the woods with it—'idden it somewhere, anyway—and if I don't say nothin', you c'n bet she won't. Only thing is—it looks like comin' 'ard on me!'

An' with that I grins back at the man.

" ' 'Op right to it, me man!' I says, although I didn't feel any too 'appy about it. 'You'll get nothin' out o' me!'

" 'E looks down at me, an' shows 'is white teeth.

" 'Very good!' 'e says.

"WELL, it looked to me like the best thing I could do was to try an' remember me prayers, with this crowd an' their 'ot irons, for I certainly didn't like the way the two uglies was goin' on. Still, there was always this to it: Om-dong 'ad got clear of 'em, and trust 'er—I did—not to let me down while there was any way at all of gettin' me clear of the mess. Seemed

to me it was a race between them an' their gun barrels an 'er an' 'er friends, old Hi Fat an' the rest. An' the game was worth playin' for, what with that string of sparklers an' all; I wasn't goin' to give them up for nothin', you may lay to it. So I set me teeth an' waited.

"The big feller says somethin' again in 'is *bat* to the others, an' they drops the heatin' of the iron, an' picks me up, bed an' all.

" 'Just to show you, Mister Griggs, that things aren't altogether what you think they are,' says 'e, an' with that they marches me, trussed like a fowl, into the next room."

Griggs paused, with his usual eye for dramatic effect, a dilapidated little figure unromantically slouched in his chair.

"Gawd, I got a knock when I went in there. First away, 'ere's Om-dong, strapped down to a bed like me, sullen as you please, but tied good an' tight as 'arf a look told me. So that finished all me fine notions of 'er gettin' clear with the stones, see? They'd got 'er as well, an' that was all there was to it—only thing was she'd not been wearin' them when they jumped 'er, seemin'ly; she'd hidin' places for that necklace even I didn't know about.

"They'd got 'er all right; but that wasn't the thing that made me go cold. Sittin' at the foot of 'er bed, as you might say, was the play actress woman, Julie La Plante.

"Well, as you'll believe, that tore it—tore it right across. There was a look in his woman's eye that tore it—kind of smolderin' flame, an' I knew that whatever chances there might 'ave been of gettin' clear of the big man and 'is couple of devils, there wasn't none of gettin' away from 'er; she'd got too much in 'er craw already. Right there I give up.

"She looks at me, and I'm tellin' you there wasn't any love an' affection in the look.

" 'So!' she says. 'My little friend, we meet again!'

"That was all. And cripes, I'd sooner have had her cut loose an' blackguard me for ten minutes!

"She turns to the big feller.

" 'Has he told, Sawcroft?' she asks. The big man shook his head.

" 'Not yet,' says he, mighty grim.

" 'VERY well,' says the woman. 'Get to work on him, anyway you like; but first I want to try this yellow animal here; she's shamming silly with me. Get one of your people to make her tell where the stones are. I can't talk to her.'

"Sawcroft says something to one of his beauties, and the man goes over to Om-dong. She'd been lying there still and stiff, with her eyes on the ceiling, and no more expression in them than in a brick; the man says somethin' to her, askin' her a question, I hear, and she doesn't make a move. Sawcroft turns to the woman.

" 'No use with that trash!' he says. 'Better let us try the gun barrel here.'

"She speaks to me again.

" 'For the last time, Griggs,' she says, 'will you tell?'

"There didn't seem to be anything particler to say to her, except to tell her an' him to get to hell quick; an' believe me, I let meself go tellin' 'em! I don't s'pose you've ever 'ad the pleasure of cursin' a party, knowin' pretty well it was the last time you'd 'ave the chance.

" 'Very pretty, Mr. Griggs!' sneers the man. 'Now we'll just see if you can sing a different tune!' And 'e nods to the two oily devils with 'im.

Griggs ran a hand cautiously over the bandage on his head.

"D'j'ever see that game?" he asked. "Red 'ot iron on yer skull? It 'urts."

"I'LL pass by the next few minutes," Griggs went on ruefully. "Don't remember a lot about 'em, anyway—except—funny!—the smell o' burnin' 'air an' skin. I guess I must 'ave about made up me mind me number was up, an' quit worryin' mostly.

"Then I 'ears Om-dong speakin', an' b'lieve me she'd plenty to say. It was in 'er own lingo—I don't understand it yet—

and one of the niggers says somethin' to Sawcroft. 'E stops attendin' to me with the gun barrels.

" 'She's told,' 'e says to the woman.

" 'What's she say?'

" 'E listens again to the nigger.

" 'Says she's got 'em 'idden outside. She'll take us to 'em, if we'll let Griggs 'ere go!'

"The woman laughs, an' you can b'lieve it didn't sound pretty.

" 'Let 'im go!' she says. 'After what 'e's done to me? Not on your life! We'll deal with him later!'

"And she cuts Om-dong loose 'erself, and pulls 'er on 'er feet.

" 'Tell 'er to take us to 'em,' she says, 'or it'll be the worse for 'er!' And she pulls a little automatic out of the pocket of 'er coat.

"I'M WATCHIN' Om-dong's face as well as I can while they tells 'er this, and at first she shuts up sulky like she does. Face like the side of an 'ouse, and I thinks, 'Yus, you obstinate little devil, you would!' About then I was givin' up again, I c'n tell you, for I know what she's like when she's crossed.

"Then she grins, standin' there, an' begins talkin' 'er kind of English.

" 'I tell!' she says. 'No give a damn what you do with 'im. He bad man! Beat me! Hit me! Now you beat him! You come with me!'

"An' she shakes 'er little yellow fist in my face.

"Well, I s'pose I was a bit shook up one way and another, an' maybe I wasn't thinkin' so clear as I might 'ave been—but this 'ere was about the end of it. You'll remember I'd taken 'er off of Four-Times-He and the Portugoose, an' these yellow girls is pretty unsteady most times. Besides I'd caught 'er makin' eyes at other men before, an' by jiminy it's what she was doin' with this 'ere Sawcroft now. She snuggles up to 'im, an' rubs 'erself against 'im like she does, an' Sawcroft grins at 'er.

" 'Ah,' 'e says, ' 'ere's some one knows which side 'er bread's buttered!' And 'e smiles across at Julie La Plante.

" 'Stop that foolin'!' she says, very sharp. 'They told me in Sourabaya that was one of your little faults, my friend, and I'm not goin' to have you runnin' with any of these girls 'ere until the job's done. Tell 'er to show us the stones!'

" 'Come along, then,' 'e says to her. 'Are you goin' to leave this feller 'ere like this?'

"She looks down at me very venomous.

" 'Yes,' she says. 'We'll leave Mr. Griggs here, and I'll see he's attended to when we come back. Tell your people to follow close, an' keep an eye on the girl; no sense in lettin' 'er escape now.'

"An' with that out they goes, Om-dong, the little devil, purrin' round the big man like a cat, an' the two big niggers followin' close be'ind. Sawcroft puts out the lamp as 'e goes, an' makes some clever remark about leavin' me to my meditations."

GRIGGS looked once again across the clearing, where the falling sun shot sparks out of the great stones on the yellow girl's neck. He laughed.

"They wasn't any too nice, either, what 'e called my meditations. 'Ere I was, tied down like a slaughter'ouse pig, couldn't move 'and or foot in the dark, waitin' for Sawcroft an' the woman to come back an' finish me off proper—and I'd mighty small doubt it would be proper, too.

"Om-dong? Dunno as I thought much about 'er in the dark there. Feller 'oo takes up with these yeller girls 'as got to expect this kind of thing, I thinks to meself; and then, what with funk—don't tell me nothin' about not bein' afraid of dyin'; I am, an' so are you—an' pain, an' so on, I guess I must 'ave got a trifle light 'eaded. I remember thinkin' quite a deal about old days, when I was a focsle 'and, and about Four-Times-He, an' wonderin' whether they'd plant me in a row with 'em across there—" he nodded at the little burying ground—"when they'd done with me, and all that kind o' thing.

An' then I was awake again—most tremenjous awake—an' the light filterin' through the screens, and Om-dong was cuttin' the straps with a knife . . .

" 'Get gun!' she says. 'You come with me, quick!'

"I stood up, so stiff I c'd scarcely move. Om-dong tugs at me sleeve.

" 'You come damn' quick!' she says again.

" 'What is it?' I asks, stupid-like.

" 'Sands!' she says. 'In the sands—them in sands!'

"By cripes!"

GRIGGS stood up and beckoned me to follow him. We went across the clearing, and Om-dong grinned cheerily at me as we passed her and her brood. Down a winding path, brilliant with tropical butterflies and festooned with lianas, we dropped down to sea level, and finally stood looking out over the sulky ocean swell creaming on the beach. Griggs took my arm.

"See that?" he asked, pointing to a patch of grayer sand prominent against the white.

"Quicksands," he said, "and the quickest I've seen. There was the four of 'em there that mornin', 'eld fast, an' sinkin' as nice as you please, and b'lieve me the noise they was makin' was wicked.

"Om-dong she dances round like a kid, clappin' 'er 'ands.

" 'Damfool!' she says; an' again, 'Damfool!' 'alf a dozen times. I'd not 'eard 'er say that since the time old Four-Times-He passed out.

"I stood an' looked at the three of them—one of the niggers was gone by this time—an' then I runs down to the edge, as near as I could, an' stretches out the gun to Julie La Plante.

" 'Ere, 'ang on!' I says, for I don't like killin' women, as maybe you've 'eard me say before. 'Ang on, an' I'll 'ave you out!'

"She wasn't no more than up to 'er knees, an' I was pullin' 'er out easy enough, when Sawcroft raises a 'owl be'ind 'er.

" 'Elp me too!' 'e says. 'Griggs, 'elp me for the love of God!' An', gorblime, if 'e doesn't start prayin' out loud!

" 'All in good time!' I says, 'eavin' at Julie pretty good an 'ard. By an' by she comes out with a plump, an' I 'ands 'er behind me back to Om-dong. Then I looks at Sawcroft, and 'is nigger.

"Sawcroft's pretty well up to 'is hips, but 'e's tall an' strong, and I see we'll 'ave 'im out all right if we can reach 'im. The rifle's too short, though, by three feet or more, an' it looks a lot like me lad's number's up. 'E's prayin' an' cursin' a deal, but that don't get 'im any closer to the end of the rifle barrel. An' then 'e does a thing what shows the kind of a feller 'e is.

"The nigger was mostly between 'im an' me, sunk to the waist, an' goin' down quickly; like most of these folk 'ereabouts, 'e seems to think it ain't worth puttin' up any fight, and 'e's just lettin' 'imself go as easy as 'e can. Sawcroft can just reach 'im.

" 'E fumbles in 'is pocket an' pulls out an automatic.

" 'Stand aside!' 'e says to me, an' with that 'e plugs the nigger good an' clean through the back of the 'ead. I 'ears Julie squeal be'ind me. The nigger flops down flat on the sand, spread out like a frog.

"Now!" says Sawcroft, an' wrenches 'imself forward till 'e can get a grip of the dead man. Bit by bit 'e 'auls 'imself up till 'e can lay 'old on me rifle.

" 'Once more, Mister Griggs!' 'e says, quite cool now. 'One more 'eave, an' up goes the donkey—*an' there's for you, me cockney friend!*'

"An' damme if 'e don't let drive at me with the pistol just as 'e's comin' to land—got me too, through the forearm 'ere. The dirty 'ound—

"Well, of course, after that there wasn't anything but to pull the trigger of me rifle, quick as might be; an' I done it, an' Sawcroft 'e falls across the nigger with a splash, an' 'es there yet."

Griggs shook his head, and I imagined it was with regret that there was not another homemade grave to adorn his cemetery. But he laughed, and continued:

"Told you that yeller girl of mine was a 'ero, didn't I? Twice she saved me life that night—once from Sawcroft and 'is 'ot irons—and once right then from Julie. That woman's a devil; she pulled 'er gun on me while I was watchin' the end of Mister Sawcroft, and if it 'adn't been for Om-dong flyin' at 'er like a wild-cat, I'd 'ave been there with the others now."

He paused reflectively, and then laughed again.

"An' I've shipped Julie back out of 'ere to Sourabaya again," he said. "'Ear anything of 'er there?"

"Enough to send me down here hell for leather," I said. "You'd better come off in the *Kittiwake* for a while, till this thing blows over a little. That woman'll have you yet, Griggs!"

He gave a comical little hoot of derision.

"Run away! Me!" he cried. "Not if I know it! And there's no Julie La Plante to get me, not while this one's 'ere, leastways; is there, Om-dong?"

The yellow girl had followed us down to the beach and stood there at her master's elbow, a wide grin on her parchment face; she rubbed herself against the tatterdemalion sleeve, and murmured her sole English term of endeared admiration.

"Damfool!" said Om-dong. "Damfool!"

The HOTTENTOTS *by* DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT

ETHNOLOGY AND TRIBAL DIVISIONS

THE ETHNOLOGISTS, much as they regret the fact, are driven to realize that a misnomer has merely to be used long enough, to gain something amounting to permanency. So at this late hour it is not possible to interdict the use of the name "Hottentot" to represent a nation of incredible antiquity and no little achievement in the development of mankind.

The early Dutch travelers by the Cape of Good Hope found a race of people whose speech was characterised by such queer, clucking sounds that they dubbed them "Hüttentüt", a Frisian word meaning a "quacking". They deemed it impossible to acquire such a language and thereby learn what the people called themselves.

They misjudged them without knowing it, for the *Khoi-khoi*—men of men—were a highly developed, thoughtful and intelligent nation. It was admittedly difficult to place them in any particular category, as they were yellow men, surrounded on all sides by the black men. Several praiseworthy attempts were made to gain some little idea of their language, but for a long time no advance was made.

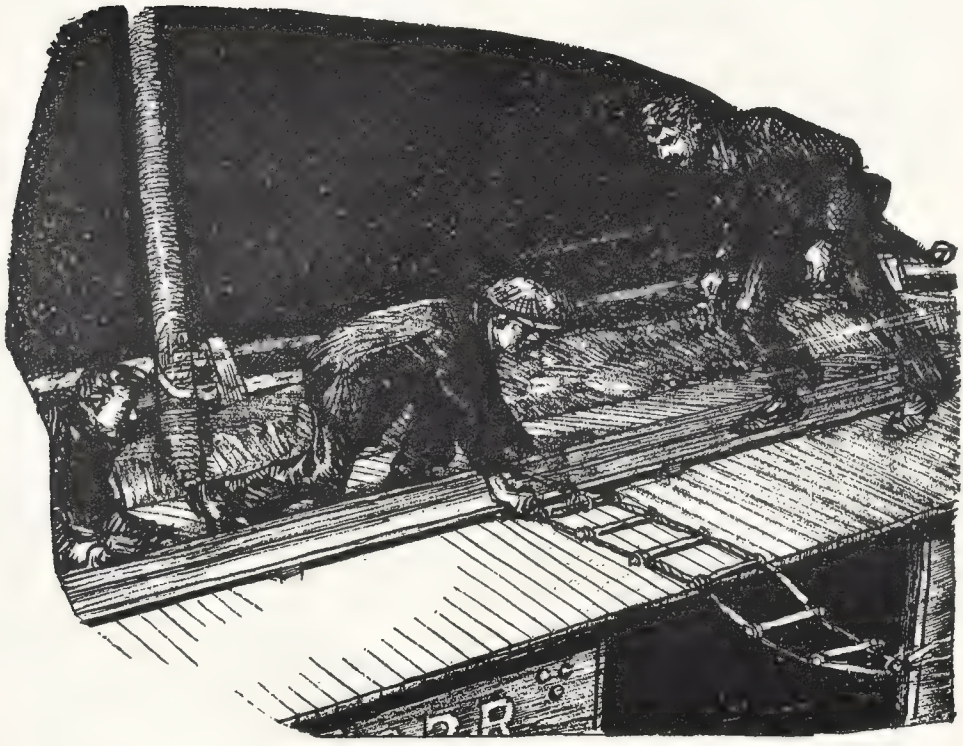
They are cattle, sheep and goat herdsmen, peaceable and hospitable to a degree. They are of Mongoloid stock and once held sway over a far wider stretch of territory than is now theirs. Theophilus Hahn, one of the pioneers of Hottentot studies, says that formerly "these Hottentots occupied almost the whole of South Africa." They are proud and self-respecting, and have framed laws not merely for the preservation of tribal purity, but for the protection of personal and communal liberty.

The origin of the Hottentots is largely shrouded in mystery. The little we know of their beginnings is gained from their own traditions, but these are by no means complete, as yet.

RATTLER PROWLER

A Story of Freight-Car Silk Thieves

By W. RYERSON JOHNSON



JOE SMITH, freckled faced and boyish, not four months out of the trenches of France, slept soundly curled up in the dust under the freight platform of the Oriental Products Company of New Jersey. He did not like the dust but it was better than the dew. Better, too, than flophouses or jails where he had found a fellow collected an even more varied assortment of the lower forms of animal life than in the trenches.

Before Joe lied about his age to join the Army he had worked on farms out West. Joe Smith was not his real name. But since nobody had ever told him what his real name was, this was as good as any.

Hoarse voices, the bark of a revolver . . . Joe jerked mechanically to his feet. Instinctively he groped for a rifle which, of course, was not there. Sleep drugged nerves refused at once to direct him farther. He stood, bent over and swaying; startled blinking eyes burning into the darkness of the adjacent railroad yards.

"Throw up your hands," a voice snarled.

Joe clawed the air.

"Come on out of there," the voice

snarled again, and then bellowed across the tracks to some one, "Jake, com'mer; I got one of 'em."

Joe emerged from the shadows cast by the freight platform to the slightly lighter darkness outside.

"What's the matter," he inquired.

"Matter of about ten years for you, young fellow," the voice lashed back. "What you doin' here?"

"Sleepin'."

"The hell . . . Turn around."

Expert fingers searched Joe's ragged clothes, found nothing.

"Y'see, it's like I said." Joe spoke evenly, a little challengingly. "I was just sleepin' here. You're a railroad bull, I guess. Well, I ain't been out the Army long. I can't get no job. I was just sleepin' here."

Joe wanted to like these hard boiled bulls; they all reminded him of his top sergeant, and the top had been a good guy once you got to know him. But bulls were different, it seemed.

"Just sleepin' here, huh? Just come out the Army? Where's yer papers?"

"Lost 'em."

"Lost 'em, huh?

He nodded.

"I had a medal; I lost that too."

He was not in the habit of telling about the medal. He just threw it out now as a vague feeler. He wanted to like these bulls; he wanted them to like him.

"Sure you did. Come along with me, young fellow. We won't wait for Jake. Lost yer medal, huh? I'll put you where you won't lose nothin' else."

Joe felt a firm hand grip his collar, felt himself being pushed roughly ahead. His oddly independent spirit rebelled. Already smarting under a thousand indignities bewilderingly heaped upon him these last few months, his blood was whipped to a white heat at the feel of this hand on his collar. He half turned toward his captor in trembling anger.

The sharp prod of an automatic in his ribs was the result.

"Don't try it," the grim voice warned.

Joe allowed himself to be pushed along then, away from the railroad tracks toward a maze of darkly looming warehouses. His rage mounted at every scuffling step. Months he had spent looking for work . . .

"Sorry, filled up." Or, more often, just, "Filled up." Everywhere the same —up and down from Boston to Philly— "Filled up; filled up, no work."

Wasn't as if he was asking a favor—he was big, strong. He would give them good labor for their money. . . . Money all gone—back to New York City on the freights—days of actual hunger, sun beaten streets. The hock shops then, and the loss of his "front" . . . things hadn't mattered so much then—he looked like a bum; maybe people were right, maybe he was one. But he hadn't panhandled.

Sleepless nights on the Bowery sidewalks, fruit and raw vegetables swiped from East Side pushcarts, sometimes something from the gutter—he had to live; greasy potatoes and dry bread and sour smelling meat that he got once in a while from washing dishes in some hashhouse were not enough. And he would not panhandle.

There was a gang down there on the East Side—he got to know some of the guys. They always had money; he could have hooked up with them. One of them, Mike somebody, had been in his outfit for a while overseas— Mike had asked him to do a job with them one night. But he had not. He had stayed straight.

And this was what it got him. Fellows down there all hated the bulls. Maybe what they said about them was right: the bulls were afraid to get the real guys so they framed somebody so as not to lose their jobs.

He was being framed, he guessed.

His eyebrows drew together, his jaw thrust out; he commenced to breathe a little faster.

The bull was guiding him carefully through the clutter of a material yard. His automatic was not pressing into him so hard, now. Maybe, if he was quick enough— He made a decision.

At once he could hear that whamming

sound in his ears that was his pounding pulse; his wrists and chest felt tight and it seemed he did not have to breathe. He recognized the feeling and smiled grimly to himself. It was this way waiting in the trenches on still, foggy mornings just before you went over. The feeling always left as soon as you got some action.

There was a log or something lying ahead. When they got there— Three steps now—two—

A fan of flame belched out from close ahead and the roar of a large caliber revolver deafened their ears.

JOE felt the hateful pressure against his ribs release, felt something strike against his worn canvas shoe. The bull's automatic! Some one ahead there must have nicked the bull in the wrist—he had dropped his automatic! If he could beat the bull to it . . .

Joe's smooth round face was a savage, ruthless mask as he dived for the gun. The transformation of his good natured, rather expressionless features was startling. He was a killer now; he was back between the lines on night patrol.

Almost one with Joe, the railroad detective ducked to recover his gun, while two more bullets split the night over their heads.

Joe got the gun and turned with all the mechanical precision of the soldier seasoned in close combat, to put a bullet through the abdomen of his enemy, the railroad bull.

But another instinct stopped him. Joe was not an outlaw. He had a wholehearted respect for authority. The Army had given him that. He was naturally impressionable and he had entered the Army at an impressionable age. Law was right—the bull was on the side of the law. The bull had made quite a little mistake about him, but still, he was the law.

That was his enemy somewhere in front there trying to kill them both. Joe swung the automatic around to return the fire of the unseen assailant. Two more red fan flares roared to meet him, and two bullets zunged into the wood of the nearest warehouse. So there were two of them. All right—

A heavy something hurled against his shoulder as his finger tightened on the trigger, his shot sunk in the ground at his feet. What was this? Some one had got hold of his arm and was grappling for the automatic. The bull! The fool—didn't he know that he was fighting for him?

Joe sought desperately to free his arm. The dumbwhack—if he didn't let go his arm they'd both be killed.

Thunder in Joe's ears—a flare so hot and close it spit powder into Joe's face. The enemy was charging. And the fool bull still wrestled with him for the gun.

Joe plowed his fist to the point of the bull's chin with a vicious short arm jab that had all the weight of his brawny young shoulders behind it. And as the bull that was the law slumped to the ground, Joe exchanged a shot at arm's length with the enemy.

Joe got a face full of hot powder again, but the enemy got solid lead.

Joe screamed his exultation. That was half of the enemy's force accounted for. The other half retreated, took up a new position behind a pile of lumber. Joe dropped prone behind the log.

The railroad detective was sitting up now, passing a dazed, exploring hand over his jaw. His movements drew the enemy's fire. *Zug-zug-zug*—three bullets buried themselves in the ground near him.

With the ungainly ferocity of a wildcat Joe leaped from his position of safety. Crouched before the bull, sheltering him with his body, he pumped bullets into the enemy's emplacements.

The enemy returned the fire at first, then wavered. Joe charged with an empty gun; the enemy retreated. Joe hurled his gun at the enemy's back; the retreat became a rout.

Joe turned back to the bull. He was on his feet now, still tenderly massaging his jaw. Joe stopped in his tracks, his consciousness only now assailed by the import of what he had done; he had sloughed

the bull! Of course, it had been a kind of —special thing. But it seemed you could not always depend upon the law to recognize special things.

Joe heard running footsteps. Some one approaching. That would be Jake—another dumb bull. Joe turned and sped through the darkness in the direction of the railroad yards.

Somebody was hollering for him to stop. That dumb Jake. He heard the bark of a revolver and the ping of a soft nosed bullet flattening out against the side of a steel gondola in the freight yards ahead.

He kept on, reached the tracks, crawled under the first string of freight cars and paused to listen, breathing hard. Yes, they were still coming after him. He ran along the cinder path for a few car lengths, then crawled under another string of cars, and another and another.

On the next track was a time freight all made up. Lights on the caboose, long way back; engine steaming way up ahead, air hissing through the hose connections.

The moon was out from behind the clouds now. He could see better. And be seen too. He frowned, stood a little back and anxiously scanned the car tops. Solid train of boxes and no open reefers as far as he could see. He would have to get inside somewhere—this moonlight—the bulls would be all over the outside of the train.

Far to the rear he saw a lantern swinging. From the locomotive came two long whistle blasts and two short ones. The highball. The old rattler would be starting now.

Stepping up to the door of the nearest box car he wrenched the lead seal from its fastenings. He hoped passionately that the heavy door would not stick.

It did not. It yielded little by little to his violent jerking, pushing and pulling. The train was moving slowly out of the yards as he climbed inside and pulled the door shut behind him and fastened it from the inside after a manner he had lately learned.

Until now he had ridden only in empty cars. He had never before broken a seal. He knew it was a prison offense, against the law, but the law was after him anyway. The law was funny like that. It puzzled him when he thought about it. It was against the law just to be out of a job, it seemed, when there were not any jobs.

Well, everything was all right now. He had fixed the seal on the outside so it looked all right if you were just passing by. The train was moving; the fastenings had been inspected for the last time, anyway. He could get out at the first stop—watch from the shadows somewhere and see whether the brakey noticed the broken seal. If he did he would not ride any farther on that train. Easy.

He felt about in the darkness of the car. The floor was clear in front of the doorway. Behind the wooden dunnage erected at each side of the door was some kind of stuff, bales or crates or something—it did not matter. He crawled up on top of the merchandise, and groping his way to one end of the car, settled himself comfortably.

THE FREIGHT had been pounding along for about an hour when, above the interminable train noises—the grinding and clicking of the car wheels over the track, the groaning of the brake beams, the creakings of the swaying wooden box car—a loud knock sounded at the car door.

Joe jerked out of a half doze to listen. Again he heard it. Kids shying rocks at the passing train, he thought. But not at this time of night, he reconsidered.

There was another knock, a double one this time. Then *klock-klock, klock-klock*—More knocks followed at regular intervals. Sharp, imperative, ominous—*klock-klock-klock-klock.*

Then Joe became conscious of a new noise. A scraping and scuffling at the door of the car and a rattling of the door fastenings.

Alarmed, he crouched forward and waited there in the blackness for some-

thing, anything to happen. The train was thundering along, the car jolting and swaying. Then how could any one be outside rattling the door fastenings? They could not. Joe raised a slow hand to rub his head. He must be dreaming.

But the unusual noises outside the car continued. Then suddenly, in spite of the ingenious manner in which he had wedged the door from the inside, it commenced to open. Inch by inch at first, then with a jerk which opened it for two feet or more.

A bulky object, apparently suspended inert in mid air, swayed indistinctly back and forth just outside the opening. As Joe watched, tense and unbreathing, the swaying bulk seemed to evolve into the figure of a man. Poised there in the air the figure apparently stretched out an arm, then stepped lightly on to the floor of the car.

For an instant the form was dimly visible in the lighter darkness in front of the partly opened door. Then it moved to one side. The train noises smothered any sounds it may have made; the inky blackness blotted its movements.

Joe chilled. What kind of thing was this—a man coming walking through the side door of a thundering box car? His mind revolted. Why, you couldn't do it, that's all. Ghosts, spirits? The guys in the Army used to talk about 'em sometimes. Joe did not believe in spirits. But —he ran a dry tongue over dry lips—a man couldn't do a thing like this!

The same loud insistent knockings that he had first heard at the car door now broke upon his consciousness. He strained his eyes. He seemed to make out a moving, twisting line in the doorway. Several of them. And then he knew.

The tension fled from his body like a rubber balloon deflated. Why, it was only a man, a regular man like himself that he had to deal with. He remembered now that there were rattler prowlers, men who swung freight trains as they moved out of the yards and stole things from the cars while they rolled along. A prowler entered a car with a rope ladder; he hung it down over the side from the running board on top.

That gang on the East Side that had wanted him to join them—they did things like this. And sold what they stole at the same place where he had hocked his clothes and watch. Fences, he had heard Mike call the pawnbroker.

Joe wanted to laugh his relief. This was just a rattler prowler that had entered his car. He had known there weren't any spirits. And the knockings he had heard at the car door were only the leads that the rope ladder was weighted with, as the ladder swung back and forth with the swaying of the car before the prowler started climbing down. Nothing to it.

Now a spear of white light slashed the darkness from near the door. It played nervously over the piled up merchandise at the other end of the car. Joe watched the light with a sort of shrinking fascination. It was lurching his way now. Closer and closer until at a final swerve he found himself looking full into the blinding glare.

Instinctively he raised his hands slowly above his head, palms outward. He heard a harsh laugh.

"You keep 'em up too, cull," the unseen figure behind the flashlight warned. "Don't make no mistake; I'm packin' a smoke." He flourished a heavy automatic for an instant within the rays of the light. "We was tipped off you bulls was wise to our racket tonight. Sweet little silk car nursemaid you make. Get down here in th' light at this door. C'mon, snap it out."

With his automatic burning a hole in the small of Joe's back, the rattler prowler flicked his light here and there about the car, then went through Joe's clothes with practiced hand.

"Where's yer smoke?" he demanded in an ugly tone.

"I ain't got none. You made a mistake, anyway, pardner, friskin' me. I ain't no bull—hobo."

"The hell you are." His voice grated out of the corner of his mouth. "Who

shot up Czapski tonight down by the Oriental? You don't know nothin' about that, huh? How'd ya like to have all seven o' these between the eyes?"

"You got me all wrong, pardner, I'm tellin' you," Joe insisted earnestly. "Look at me; look at these clothes. You never seen a bull dressed like me. I'm a 'bo. Bulls—" Joe spoke scathingly, and with calculated effect—"I hate 'em more 'n you do, pardner. Bulls was chasing me back in the yards. I broke in this car to loose 'em. You found the seal broke, didn't cha? If I was a bull ridin' this car I'd have 'em fix the seal outside the door, wouldn't I?"

"Yeh, you'd ought to know that much," the man growled, impressed nevertheless by Joe's logic. He played his light over Joe's face. "Say, ain't I seen you somewheres?" he demanded, a strangely disquieting quality about his voice.

"I dunno, maybe." Joe's eyes blinked and squinted in the glare of the light. "I can't see you, you know. I just come out the Army. What outfit was you in?"

An ominous silence followed Joe's query.

"I'll be damned," the man said, suddenly shoving his flashlight into his pocket.

Joe was blinking the sight back into his glare blinded eyes when he felt a pile driver fist crash into his face. He was knocked heavily back against the dunnage where he fell to the floor. He pulled himself dazedly to a sitting position.

THE RATTLER prowler was standing close over him, covering him with his automatic. He was cursing and shouting something at him . . .

"Damn' sneakin' stool pigeon. You know what we do to squealers and stool pigeons? We give 'em the works! The works, see?" He punched his automatic into Joe's side with rib cracking violence. "I told the gang they'd ought to take you for a ride a long time ago, when you first started hanging around. But Mike said he knowed you in the Army—you was all right.

"That was a good racket soaking your clothes and watch with Moe. Got the lowdown on us all around, didn't you, from where we get our stuff to where we place it?" Again that harsh laugh. "A lot of good it's gonna do you, young stool pigeon. Get up on yur feet so I can knock you down again. I don't want to croak you too fast."

He aimed savage kicks at Joe while he was rising.

"You're gonna do some rattler prowlin' before I polish you off. Get busy and rustle them bales down here by the door. G'wan, get the silk; bend double or you'll cheat yurself out of about twenty minutes of livin'."

The man backed up and reaching one hand behind him, leant the weight of his body to shoving the car door the rest of the way open.

Joe worked steadily while the man as steadily cursed and railed at him. Joe worked because he knew the man's ruthless, lawless breed. The time for reasoning with him was past. The man had meant it when he had said he was going to kill him. Joe was not fooling himself about that. His only chance, he knew, was in obeying the man's slightest whim, putting off as long as possible that moment when he would be "given the works"; and in the meantime, watching, watching.

But the man was watching, too. Not for an instant was Joe out from under the threatening snub nose of that automatic.

"All right, get the hell down here," the man shouted suddenly. "This rattler's gonna hit a grade now, and it'll run slow. When I tell you, start pushin' them bales out the car."

Joe's eyes glinted at this order. Once more the old familiar whamming in his ears while he did not seem to need to breathe. He had made another decision. He would throw himself out of the car with one of the bales. They would take pot shots at him—this guy here in the car and the ones outside. And if he hurt himself so he could not run—well, it would only be what would happen to him for sure if he stayed in the car. This way there would be some chance.

As the train slowed on the upgrade the rattler prowler cast quick anxious glances out of the car door ahead. He was mumbling to himself—

"The light; why the hell don't Mike show his light?" Then savagely to Joe, "Come on, stool pigeon, we can't wait till we hit the top of the grade. The hell with Mike and his light. This is the place. Get goin'. Push 'em fast, too, damn you; our friends with the motor trucks don't want to have to pick 'em up from all over the country."

Joe worked quickly, keeping an eye outside the door noting how the bales fell.

"The faster you work the quicker you get croaked, but if you don't work fast you get croaked quicker." Once more the man laughed harshly. "Figure that one out, stool pigeon."

But Joe did not need to figure it out.

A fusillade of bullets sprayed them from somewhere out of the dark along the railroad right of way. The bark of exploding cartridges sounded ineffectual above the grinding train noises. But their result was convincing.

Some of the bullets rasped through the wood on either side of the door. One licked through Joe's coat sleeve. One, even more convincing, pierced the rattler prowler's heart.

Joe pounced upon the automatic where it lay on the floor, glinting dully in the haze of moonlight. He spent no time in speculation over the fact that fate had twice that evening assumed for him the responsibility of carrying out his decisions at crucial moments. It had been that way often in the war; this was like war.

What he did speculate upon was the fact that it would never do for him to be caught by a bunch of bulls in a silk car with the dead body of a rattler prowler. The train was hitting it up now. But at the next town it would undoubtedly be boarded.

He moved toward the door. There was a small dark object on the floor tremoring to the vibration of the car. It was almost ready to fall out of the door. Joe picked it up. It was a billfold or something. He thrust it into his inside pocket and buttoned his coat.

Reaching out he clawed in the rope ladder, yanked on it a few times, then swung out and climbed the twisting, turning thing to the top of the swaying box car.

When he reached the roof he peered cautiously over. The dead man, he thought, might have had a pal up here—some one to watch the rope ladder. But there was no one in sight. He hauled himself over the edge and crawling to the runway, straightened and started running lurchingly down the length of the jolting car. He wanted to get as far away as he could from the incriminating silk car, then when the train slowed, drop off.

But before he reached the end of the car, the head and shoulders of a man thrust themselves above the roof directly in his path. The man fired at him with a revolver. Joe missed his step, pitched forward on the car roof and lay still. His automatic was knocked out of his hand by the fall. It lay just beyond his reach beating a sharp rhythm on the vibrating tin car roof.

Joe's heart was beating as sharply. He had had more shooting tonight than he had sometimes for weeks in France. And it was not over yet. His new enemy was pulling himself up on to the roof by the grabirons at the end of the car. He might have been crawling out of a trench, Joe thought, and he laying there in No Man's Land playing dead. The enemy approached Joe warily and stooped to pick up the automatic.

The locomotive at that instant plunged on a down grade, imparting a fierce tug to the long string of freight cars under its charge. There was a muffled staccato bang as the couplers were yanked taut. Joe's enemy dropped to one knee to steady himself and, aided by the same lunge of the car which impeded the enemy, Joe precipitated himself upon him.

His hand sought and grasped the enemy's revolver wrist, and together the two men crashed to the car roof. The car reeled and jolted and swooped while there on the

slippery roof these two rolled, writhed and fought with frenzied ferocity; striking, clawing, biting, kicking; expecting no quarter, giving none. Two blood crazed animals, each bent upon the other's destruction. For with the train hurtling through the night on the down grade, a plunge from the top to the rocky road bed below could mean only death.

Joe kept seeing helmets and dirty gray uniforms. Vaguely he regretted that he had not a bayonet. He succeeded in knocking the revolver from the enemy's hand finally. And then, with victory in his grasp, the enemy received reinforcements.

THE FIGHTING became more grimly calculated now. Outnumbered two to one, Joe was forced to take the defensive, while the enemy, certain of ultimate victory, refused unnecessary risks—no good to throw a man off the top of a speeding train if he pulls you with him.

There was less reckless slugging which imperiled one's balance, and more quick jabbing, pushing, grabbing, feinting. Legs spread wide and bodies crouched the better to maintain their unsteady equilibrium, the three wavered first toward one end of the car roof and then the other, each seeking to catch his enemy off balance, each warily avoiding a clinch that did not carry with it a decisive advantage.

Joe strove to maintain a middle position on the narrow runway which extended the length of the car. Like this, he reasoned, if the newcomer had a gun he would hesitate to shoot. He found it not difficult to keep between the two men. Neither of them wished to pass around him badly enough to risk leaving the wooden runway for the less secure footing of the dew drenched tin roof. But fighting so, the odds were yet greatly against him. He must be continually changing his front, which exposed him to a rear attack no matter to which side he turned. And he was of necessity spending his strength more quickly than they.

But one thing to do. He must get around one of the men—the one that did not have a gun, so that the other for the first second or two could not shoot. He must get around him, run the length of the car, or two cars, climb down the grabirons and fling himself from the train. He would have a chance this way—hitting the grit from low on the irons. There was a knack to it—double up and roll; an old hobo had shown him.

Joe lunged at the one of his enemies who he knew had no gun, feinted with his right and planted a staggering left to his chest. Depending upon the unexpectedness of his heedless assault to save him from a clinch, Joe bore in with both fists, battering his enemy back with short arm jabs to the head and body.

The man dropped to his knees, clutching the boards of the runway with his two hands. It was the opportunity for which Joe sought. It would allow him to step aside on to the treacherous tin roof, and pass the man without danger of being knocked from the car. Over his shoulder Joe caught a glimpse of his other enemy hurling himself forward. He took a whip lashing step on the tin roof, arching his back to avoid the grip of his attacker. The arch was sufficient. The enemy's lunge was short by an inch.

But Joe's worn, rubber soled sneakers slipped on the wet tin. His feet went out from under him; he fell violently, sliding toward the edge of the roof.

Before he could recover himself his opponents were upon him. Joe got one foot under him, half raised himself in the face of their pummelings, slipped again and felt his legs dangling over the side.

Like wolves with the smell of blood in their nostrils, Joe's enemies sought to finish their kill.

Faster and faster their blows were rained upon him. With his body slipping —slipping—following his dangling legs over the side. Joe clawed with a wild frenzy at their clothes, dug his fingernails into the tin roof until they were so broken he could no longer hear them rasp.

But while he fought for life his mind

was now resigned. He had seen death in its most hideous forms. He did not fear it. It was his time to go, well, all right. Only—so many things he had not seen, had not done that other people did. There was a girl too, in France. God, he did not want to die. He was not afraid; it was all right, only it was so good to live . . .

A blow stronger than the rest lost Joe his thread of balance.

With an agonized sob, over the side he went.

He hung there for a moment at arm's length, clinging to the swaying roof edge. Below the car wheels clicked and there was a blur of white rock.

He felt them kicking at his fingers. His grip loosened; he shut his eyes.

Then strangely, hands closed about his wrists; he found himself being dragged laboriously back to the roof of the car.

He lay there gasping, dimly aware of a confusion of excited, angry voices. Gradually the voices assumed identity. There was a third man here now. He seemed to be the boss. His loud wrathful words began to pierce Joe's consciousness.

"Damn' fools, you know our instructions. One of these birds alive is worth ten of 'em dead. This gang talks; when we get him to headquarters. . ."

Joe understood then. It was not rattler prowlers he had been fighting it out with, but a couple of bulls. He had thought the bulls were crooks; the bulls had thought he was a crook. That was a kind of joke on everybody. Joe raised himself painfully on his elbow and looked around ready to be friendly.

The man who had been talking covered him with his gun.

"Stand up," he ordered.

Then when Joe had staggered to his feet—

"Search him."

The billfold was the only thing to be found. It was handed to the bull in charge who looked sketchily through its contents and enumerated some of them in a tone of brittle, hard satisfaction. There was a bill of large denomination, several significant newspaper clippings, certain names, addresses and telephone numbers. Joe recognized some of the names and addresses. Moe's was one of them. Moe the pawnbroker, Moe the fence.

It was chilly up there on that car top, but Joe felt sweat breaking out all over him. Naive as he was, he realized how tight a chain of circumstantial evidence entangled him.

He was in a worse fix even than the bull knew. He had been hanging around the same places where this gang stayed. Plenty would testify about that. They would be glad to see him sent up. Even Mike did not like him any more, since that time when he would not do that job with him.

The train was running slowly on another upgrade now.

"This is one prowler that'll be in stir the rest of his natural life," Joe heard the bull with the gun say.

"I ain't no prowler, mister—just a hobo," Joe protested earnestly.

"Oh, yeh? And this billfold—it ain't yours, you just picked it up."

"Yeh, I just picked it up."

The men laughed coarsely. The bull in charge glowered at Joe in the darkness, a ruthless gleam mounting in his eyes as he continued his sarcastic baiting.

"And when you come up out of the car on the rope ladder you was just taking your morning exercise before going to the office wasn't you? And the gat you was packin' was just one of them toy ones you'd bought for your kid to play Fourth of July with."

"It ain't no use for me to talk, I guess," Joe muttered. "You won't believe nothin' I say. But I ain't no rattler prowler, anyway. I ain't no regular hobo, even. I just come out the Army an' I can't get no job."

THE BULL stepped close to Joe and flashed his light in his face. Joe continued talking.

"I was just ridin' in the car—I didn't know it was silk in there. A prowler come into the car and some one shot him from outside back there some-

where. He's inside the car now, dead. I picked up his gun and the billfold that was on the floor without thinking much and climbed up on top. That's where I met these guys."

"Sure — pretty soon I'll tell one. Where'd you get in the car?"

"Back in the yards just when the train was startin'."

"Broke the seal, huh?"

"Yeh, I broke the seal. But that's all I done against the law. I wasn't goin' to steal nothin'. Just ride."

"Sure. Broke the seal on a silk car to take a ride." He laughed shortly and raised his voice to the others who were sitting down resting at a little distance behind Joe's back. "Get that? Good, huh?"

"I didn't know it was silk. I just broke the seal on the first car I come to. I had to get inside somewheres—the bulls was chasing me."

Joe bit his tongue for saying this last, but it was too late now.

"Bulls was chasing you, huh? What for?"

"Sleepin'."

He snorted.

"You'd give the boys a loud laugh if you told this story on the stand. You can do plenty of time for this, young fellow."

Joe glanced about restlessly, bitterness and desperation welling hot in his blood. So this was all he had been saved for—to spend the rest of his life in jail. And all he had done against the law was break a seal on a box car!

Well, they'd never send him to jail! The old pounding in his temples, his wrists, his chest. He'd jump off the top of the train first. It was going pretty slow now. It might not kill him. If it did—wouldn't be much different from staying in jail the rest of his life. Any kind of chance was worth taking. They'd be putting handcuffs on him pretty soon. He'd better do it now—one step and a jump . . .

His glance flicked from side to side, weighing his chances. Didn't seem to make much difference one side or the other. He crouched slightly, tensing himself.

"You damn' young fool!" The bull's angry, half hushed words were in his ears, the bull's automatic prodded his ribs.

When the bull spoke again it was in a crisp, low tone.

"I think you're a crook, kid. But I'm going to slip a gat in your pocket, see? The other fellows haven't got theirs. When I step back, stick us up. Take my gat—not the billfold, see, the gat—and make a fade. I'll forget about it, see? And so will the other two—they frisked you, they'll be hard up to tell why they didn't find a gat on you. I'll be obliged if you'll drop my gat for me alongside the track somewhere close. You know me, don't you?"

Joe thought he did.

"You're the bull that picked me up tonight alongside the yards where I was sleepin' under the freight platform?"

"Yeh, and the bull that you squatted down in front of and shot it out with the guy that would 'a' killed him."

Joe was not sure he had it all straight. His mind was having to make a bewildering readjustment. The way it looked, the law did recognize special things, after all.

"You think I'm a crook, but you're letting me go?"

"Right."

"You're a bull."

"Wrong, young fellow. I *was* a bull."

"What?"

"I resigned just before I slipped the gat in your pocket."

"You're goin' to quit yur job?"

"I have quit."

"Why?"

"You wouldn't understand, young fellow."

Joe tried to think why it would be. He never did quite figure it out. But it was on account of letting him go, he realized. The man probably had a wife and some kids, too. He was a good guy, all right.

"You'd have a hard time to find another job," Joe said. "I been lookin' for

one for four months now." His hand moved toward his pocket. "Here, take your gun back—you can arrest me."

"You're crazy." The bull spoke sharply and his arm shot out to stay Joe's hand. "You wouldn't have a chance in hell, don't you know that? They'll give you twenty years—whether you're a crook or not."

"I ain't no crook," Joe mumbled.

The bull was silent for a moment. From the locomotive far ahead a spurt of steam shot up, rose tinted from the glow of the fire box, and a subdued whistle blast was waved back to them over the car tops.

The bull spoke in a tone Joe had never heard a bull use before.

"I'm goin' to gamble on you, kid. Here, you do just like I said, see, only keep the gat and go hang out at the jungle—town right ahead here, Lanesboro. I'll meet you there sometime tomorrow. You can tell me some more about that medal you got in the war, see? And if everything's like you say—how'd you like to work for me, kid? How'd you like to be a bull on this railroad?"

Each cut and bruise on Joe's aching body, each broken, blood smeared finger nail were things to be cherished, so Joe thought as he threw the gun on the three bulls there on the roof of the now gently swaying box car. He had found a friend and he was going to have a job—such a job as he had never dreamed.

ROMANCE *of a* DIAMOND DISCOVERY

By LAWRENCE G. GREEN

DIAMONDS more beautiful than anything the world has seen will be sent to the cutters in Europe when the official ban on the new areas in Namaqualand is removed.

These rich patches of gravel near the mouth of the Orange River have already yielded stones worth nearly half a million pounds—and the surface has only been scratched. A cabinet minister recently spent an hour picking up stones on a claim. There was no laborious digging or washing. He collected everything that looked like a diamond, and when his finds were sorted their value was £600.

In size, purity and quality, the Namaqualand stones compare favorably with the historic finds of the past. Very few people have been allowed to see them. The claims at the mouth of the Orange River are being guarded; but the territory is so large that it has been impossible to prevent raids.

The raiders make swift motor car dashes from the alluvial diggings in the Transvaal, across the lonely veld to Namaqualand. They seem to know exactly where to search; and they rush their illicit finds back to their own claims where they are able to "discover" and register them without danger of being caught.

The late Fred C. Cornell, the author and prospector who knew the mysterious territory south of the Orange River better than any other explorer of his time, followed the legendary gleam of diamonds in the desert sand for years without success. In his books and articles he predicted that vast quantities of diamonds, washed down towards the mouth of the river from inland diamond pipes, would one day be discovered. And now, after his death, the stories which the primitive little Hottentots of the Richtersveld told him have at last come true.

Diamonds have also been found on the islands off the coast to the north of the Orange River. Many scientists believe that all the coast diamonds originate in a parent rock on the bed of the ocean, and that they work their way through submarine pipes into the gravel of the shore.

A Story of the World War

By
WESTON MARTYR

A BREATH *of* FRESH AIR

THE NIGHT was stifling; and a sane man would have worn nothing but pajamas or, better still, a sarong. But I, being a first class passenger, was constrained to suffer the tortures reserved for the damned and those convention ridden souls who must array themselves in starched collars and dinner jackets, no matter what the thermometer may say. Fate and the deck steward had ordained, moreover, that my chair be placed on the lee side of that south bound liner's promenade deck, and I knew full well that any attempt to move it to a cooler situation would be regarded by the steward as an outrage, by my fellow passengers as an annoyance, and by the captain as an unwarrantable violation of all the rules of the ship.

In front of me the deck was cluttered with super-heated couples dancing to the clamor of the ship's band. In the deck chair on my right reclined a lady who persisted in an attempt to awe me with a relation of alleged triumphs achieved in the course of at least forty London seasons. On my left sat a gentleman with

three over ripe chins and the nose and eye of a predatory vulture who, I knew, awaited merely the opportunity to explain to me again how profiteering was one thing, but that the incidental accumulation of a fortune through supplying "our brave boys in the trenches" with tinned beef stew was quite another matter altogether. In the offing hovered three dreary individuals who had clearly marked me down as that victim who makes "the fourth" at bridge. On account of these things, therefore, I abandoned my seat among the mighty and fled to the forecastle head in search of a breath of fresh air.

There I found a large man sitting on the starboard mooring bitts. He was dressed solely in a pair of pants and a low necked singlet; but he looked so comfortable that I sat down on the bitts too.

"Good evening," I said. "It's hot tonight, isn't it?"

The large man, however, did not respond to my advances. Indeed the sight of me appeared to revolt him. Or perhaps it was my dinner jacket which offended his eyes. In any case he merely grunted and turned away from me to spit, copiously, into the sea. And then for a long time we both were silent as we sat there, side by side, gazing at the tumbled wildfire of our bow wave and listening to the hiss of our big ship forcing her passage through the sea.

And that, I fear, might perhaps have been the end of our acquaintance, had not the quiet of the night been rent, just then, by a sudden piercing yell which burst from the darkness close above me. I was startled. Thanks to a salvo of Boche 5.9's, which once blew me up and then buried me, I am very easily startled. At that unexpected yell my broken nerves betrayed me shamefully, and I cried out and clutched at the large man. I felt an arm as firm and solid as the limb of a hardwood tree encircle me and:

"Hold up, mate," I heard the large man say. "It's all right. You just hang on to me."

Thus reassured, my trouble passed from me, and I sat up and tried to thank the man.

"That's all right, brother," said he, cutting me short. "No need to try and tell *me*. I've seen shell shock before. Lots of it. There was a chap in my section once— But never mind about him just now. I'm afraid I seemed a bit stand-offish when you spoke to me. I'm sorry. You see, I didn't know then that you'd been through it too. That was only the lookout in the crow's nest who scared you. He was hailing the bridge. Says he saw a light ahead or something. Ah! And I should say he did, too. Look at her! There she comes—and she's a hummer. Just look at her show of lights. Like the old Crystal Palace gone on the spree. And there go the fireworks and all. Bust my soul bolts if we haven't got here just in time for a regular, real old Brock's Benefit."

The long rows of lighted ports on the passing liner slid swiftly past, and from her bridge the colored stars of a Roman candle sprang up and out, to sail in graceful arcs toward us. They illuminated for a moment the dark water between the ships, and then fell, slowly, as if reluctant, down to the waiting sea.

"Looks just like old Jerry with the wind up," remarked the large man. "What's he sending up all those Very lights for? Thinks he hears a wiring party over here, or what?"

"Company's private night signal," I said. "They show what line she belongs to. Look! There go ours in reply. Red—white—red—green. Now they know who we are. As a matter of fact it wasn't necessary to tell them. They knew that as soon as they sighted our masthead lights. They just send up those fireworks to amuse the passengers, I think. These two ships must pass each other here or hereabouts every single voyage. They always meet just here, because they run to schedule nowadays, just like trains. I believe you could almost set your watch by them. Why, even I can tell you that's the homeward bound mail boat, three days out from Cape Town, and she'll

dock at Southampton in another two weeks to the tick. Let's see—it's the 27th today. Then that must be the old *Oronsay*—"

MY NEW friend started at the name.

"The *Oronsay!*" he cried. "Well, I'll be sugared!" And he stood up and looked hard at the stern light of that departing steamer. "Well now, that's rum," he said, sitting himself down again. "To pass *her* here, of all ships. It's funny, too, you should use pretty near the same words Steen did. 'They run as regular as trains,' he said. 'And you could set your watch by 'em.' That's just what Steen told me. And he said I'd have to have no eyes and less brains if I didn't pick her up within a mile or two of where he said I'd sight her. And now, there she goes, looking, by gum, as big and as bright as all Coney Island gone adrift on the Fourth of July. I tell you it makes me feel queer to see her. You see, if it wasn't for me— But I guess if I told you you'd call me a liar."

"Try me," I said. "From some things I've noticed I think I'm likely to believe you. And I'd like to know, anyhow, who this man Steen is who, it seems, puts words into my mouth."

"Ah, now you're asking me something," replied the big man. "I don't know. All I can tell you is he used to be my officer, once. He used Cape Dutch cuss words and signed the section sheets 'F. G. Steen, Capt.'; but I never found out what his real name was. And that's all I know, except he was the toughest bird I've ever seen in my life; and that's saying something. He was a proper bad 'un. He was one of those real bad men, you understand. The kind you don't come across often, which is lucky. Born bad, I guess, that sort are; and they go on growing worse all the while. And to look at Steen you wouldn't have thought there was anything much the matter with him. The first time I set eyes on him was in one of our gun pits on that ridge above Souchez. My officer had connected with a rifle grenade the day previous. It blew his head clean off him and left me in charge of our outfit. We were Stokes mortars. Four of 'em. Dandy little guns; but life with them, though interesting, was liable to be brief.

"I was mighty busy in that gun pit just then, I remember, because Jerry was searching for it with one of his big Minnies, and I was wishful—not to say anxious—to leave a visiting card or two with Minnie's gun crew before she dropped in on me and found me at home. The only good thing about those big trench mortar bombs is that you can see 'em coming. And I saw one coming then, straight for us. You know the shape of the things. Just like a big fat sausage. So I sung out a warning, then tried to tunnel under the trench boards and held my breath for a bit. The thing fell just short of us; but it was so close it blew the front of our pit in and plastered us all over with dollops of mud and clay.

" 'Sausage and mash that time, Sergeant,' I heard somebody say, and I looked up to see a strange officer standing beside me. It was this Steen, come to take over the section, and he was grinning at us like a damned cat. You know—one of those sneery, teethy grins, and it riled me. I felt mad, too, at him catching me taking cover like that.

" 'When you've quite finished digging yourselves in,' he says, 'you'll oblige me by springing to your filthy feet and carrying on with the job. That is, if you've got any feet, you groveling, wriggling worms you.' He said a lot more, too, but most of it was in Dutch so I can't tell you that part.

"Then he asked me if Jerry was doing much sniping around there, and I told him he could see for himself they sniped us with Minnies.

" 'Then that's all right,' says he. 'But when you talk to me, Sergeant,' says he, 'you'll be wise, my big, brave bucko, to sprinkle your conversation with a 'sir' or two. Not that I mind, mark you,' he says, 'but the high muck-a-mucks like it.

They think it's good for the troops, the Lord help them. Anyhow, bear it in mind.'

"And with that he climbed out of the gun pit until he was sticking up over the edge waist high, and he outs with his glasses and takes a good look round at Fritz. He took his own time about it, too, and presently there was a *pop*, as if some Jerry had pulled the cork out of a wine bottle. You know how silly those trench mortars used to sound. I mean, when they were fired off—not when they landed. Well, this one came sailing across, turning slowly over and over, and I could see it was going to drop almighty close to us. I didn't go to earth, though, that time.

"You see, I was thinking of some of the things that man had called us. So I stood where I was and watched what was going to happen—especially what was going to happen to Steen if he stayed up there much longer. He wasn't a fool, though. He got down and stood by me, and we waited. And when the day of judgment blew up within ten yards of us I couldn't see that man as much as wink an eye at the thing. Our gun crew, being wise, had all gone to ground early. And Steen looks down at 'em scornful. Then:

" 'Ho!' says he. 'And their bowels were turned to water. But not yours, Sergeant, I see. I'm glad,' he says, grinning at me. 'First impressions wrong again. I apologize. Well, well, to work. We will now be a little rough with those ducks across the way. In fact we'll ladle hell all over them, for I've spotted where that last sausage came from. They're my meat,' he says.

"AFTER that I took a few sighting shots, slow and careful, with Steen standing up in the open observing. And when he'd got me on good to where he judged Minnie was hid we gave her ten rounds rapid.

" 'Vast heaving,' says he then, as cool as a bottle of Bass just out of the ice chest. 'I thought those were Boches playing about there; but now I see they're some of our chaps. They're wearing our own brand of tin hat anyway. So we've been making strawberry jam out of our own friends, I fear. I'm sorry,' says he. 'My error.'

"Well, that'll show you, more or less, what sort of a bird Steen was. I never saw anything that could worry him. And I want to tell you we went through some mighty dirty times together too. The man was as brave as a tiger with cubs; I'll say that much for him; and he was the only bloke I've ever met who actually seemed to enjoy the war. Being up the line was pie to him and it used to rile him all the time while we were out of it resting. And I'm pretty sure he liked killing just for the fun of it.

"The Jerries raided us one night and some of 'em got right through to the support line, to where our Stokes were. The infantry holding our sector just then didn't happen to be very much use. They were a new mob, only a few days out from home, and they thought they were still playing at being soldiers, if you know what I mean. They hadn't had time yet to get turned into real fighting men. So, naturally, they were mighty windy. Fritz started that raid as usual with a pretty hot bombardment. It was so hot, in fact, and it lasted so long that, by the time it stopped and Jerry came over, those new boys were about as much use as so many lumps of jelly. I could see that, because that's just how I felt myself after my first dose of heavy shelling.

"These lads showed all the signs of clearing out, too; and when Steen noticed that he started to shoot a few to steady 'em. He shot six by my count, and I don't know how many more he might have got; but just then he had to pay attention to the Jerries who were jumping into the trench on top of us. It turned out there were only about a dozen who'd managed to get that far, so there wasn't any real scrapping. You know yourself what most of those small raids amounted to anyway. Tip and run—that's all they were, and a damned silly business.

"And it was just the same with those Fritzes. They'd no sooner got into our trench than they seemed mighty anxious to clear out again and beat it for home. I persuaded five of 'em to stay with a box of Millses I collected as soon as I saw the trouble starting, and after that the rest were all for kamarading.

"But that wouldn't go with Steen at all. He didn't believe in taking prisoners. He shot the first two without saying anything much except some Dutch cusses, and then he pulled himself together and took a look at the rest. There were half a dozen of them, all standing up in a row, making a blubbering sort of noise and holding their hands up. It was plain they weren't going to give us any more trouble; but Steen walks up to the nearest and looks him all over. Then he says:

" 'I don't like the look of your face, my lad. I think I'll change it for you.'

"And he did, too. Close up like that it only needed one shot to do it; and I'll guarantee that particular Fritz's own mother wouldn't have known him after Steen was through. Then he tells the second poor devil he reminds him of a man who tried to jump a claim of his once—near Barberton, he said it was.

" 'In fact,' says he, 'you must be a relation, so you'd better join the blighter.' And he drops that one, too. The third chap had sand in him. He could see what was coming all right; but he stuck it out and stood up straight and looked Steen in the eye.

" 'Well, you've got guts, at all events,' says he. 'And guts being rare these days I feel I'd like to see some.'

"And with that he jams his automatic against the poor beggar's belt and blows him wide open. Cold blooded murder it was really, and I'd had about all I wanted; but Steen was my officer and I daren't butt in and stop him. And, anyhow, if I'd tried I'm pretty sure he would have sailed into me.

"The next poor bleeder, when his turn came, was down on his knees in the trench, praying. This makes Steen grin and show his teeth worse than ever.

" 'You're making a mistake,' he says. 'You mustn't pray to me, man. Don't be so sacrilegious.'

"The blast of the shot set fire to the poor chap's tunic, and as he lay there jerking and squirming, Steen stamped his foot on him and trod the flames out.

" 'See what comes of praying to the wrong party, Sergeant,' he says. 'Hell-fire must have been regularly reaching for that man.'

"Well, after that I took a hand in the game myself. I didn't want to see any more, or hear any more. The last two Boches knew what was coming to them, all right, and they'd gone all to pieces. It was the horrible noise they made that finished me. More like animals than men. So I shot them both myself, quick, and put them out of their trouble.

"And I've got an idea Steen thought I did that for the same reason he had. For the fun of the thing, that is. Anyway, from then on he opened up with me a whole lot. I could see he'd sort of taken a fancy to me pretty soon after he joined us. He never had much to say to any one else and he was always kind of scornful of everybody. But he'd be yarning and chaffing with me though, most of the time; and after that business with the prisoners he got chummier than ever. When there wasn't any one else around to matter he'd drop the sergeant and call me Bill. Just as if he wasn't an officer.

" 'THERE are only two men who know how to fight in this whole blamed British army,' he tells me. 'You're one and I'm the other,' he says. 'The rest of them think this is a kind of sport, with Marquis of Queensbury rules to it. They're all a damned sight too squeamish. Playing the game they call it. They don't like hitting below the belt; but you can believe me they'll like it less when the other man starts kicking them in the stomach. Because the Boche aren't playing, and don't you forget it. They know they've got to fight to win a war. Knock down and drag out. Vitriol and knuckle duster.

" 'That's the way you've got to scrap. It's all rats—this killing a man in a gentlemanly manner. You've got to slit his throat for him, quick, or shoot him in the back, or gouge his eyes out, whichever comes handiest—or else he'll scrag you first. If they don't look out,' he says, 'one of these fine days the Huns will run right through this sporting army of ours, and then, where will you and I be? Did you ever think of that, Bill?'

"Yes, Steen was fed up all right with the army. He said he hadn't reckoned at having to play at little tin soldiers, and he'd been a fool to come home. He'd been prospecting in German-East, he told me, just before the war started. And according to him he'd dropped on to a patch of pay dirt that looked like panning out at well over a hundred pennyweights. The place is just south of— But never you mind where it is exactly. He'd chucked it anyway and joined up, and he said he was mighty sorry he done it.

"You can see from what I've told you that, for an officer, Steen was pretty thick with me almost from the first. But it wasn't until I happened to tell him one day how I'd been a sailor most of my time that he really opened up and began to talk to me man to man. It was only after that, too, he let out what it was he's got on his mind. And even then he was mighty crafty and careful and he only hinted at things bit by bit. Just a little bit at a time and I didn't tumble to what it was he was getting at for quite a while. At the first he asked me a regular raft of questions about the sea. Small craft it was he wanted to know about mostly. Fishing vessels and yachts and such like; and if it was safe for a small boat to make a long passage at sea.

"Amongst other things I've fished on the Grand Banks in those Gloucester schooners. And some of them are small enough for a job like that, Lord knows. So I told him about them and the way they make nothing of a gale of wind in the Western Ocean. That seemed to please him; and the next thing he wanted to know was, would it look queer or start a lot of talk if a small boat, or a yacht, say, was to sail out to the Cape from England. So I told him about Slocum and Voss and the rest of them who've made longer passages than that in little boats without any one paying much attention or raising a fuss about it. And when Steen heard that it seemed to make him more pleased with himself than ever. Then he begins pumping me about navigation. Could a small craft fix her position at sea for certain, no matter how far off the land she happened to be?

"Well, of course she can; but I had to explain to Steen how, if you only had a sight of the sun, a clear horizon and a chronometer you knew the rate of, then you could tell where you were to the dot, or within a mile or two anyway.

"And when I told him that, you should have seen him. It's the only time I ever saw Steen excited. He jumped up.

" 'Why then,' he says, 'the thing's as good as done already. That was the one and only point I had my doubts about. And, on top of it all to find that you can navigate! What extraordinary luck! I've thought for some time you're the very man I'm looking for. But this, of course, settles it.'

" 'Settles what?' " I says. " 'What's it all about, sir, anyway?'

" 'Oh, drop it,' he says. 'Don't sir me any more, for the love of Mike. Forget it! From now on you and I are partners. It's evidently ordained,' says he. 'I needed a man who wouldn't squeal at a little blood letting. And to think he can navigate, too,' he says, grinning. 'Most certainly, Bill, we've got to be partners.'

"Well, you can bet I was curious to know what sort of a business it was I'd been made a partner in so easy; but, even after what he'd said already, it was a long time before I could get that man to come right out with it and tell me the whole thing. For a day or two he'd do nothing but gas about the gold mines on the Rand. Leading me on to it gently, I suppose; or maybe he was just sizing me up still. He told me how every ounce of gold that was mined in South Africa was

shipped from Cape Town by mail boat for England. He explained how the stuff was packed and checked and weighed and then guarded every blessed mile of the way from Jo'burg until it got down on the docks at Cape Town to be loaded aboard ship, and how, from that moment nobody worried about it at all.

"He knew all about the business, all right, and it was clear enough he must have made a regular study of it. I remember he said the sight of those nets full of gold bars being slung in over the steamer's rail was enough to make you cry, and it did make his mouth water. He told me how he'd come home on the *Oronsay*—yes, that same ship we passed just now. He'd seen with his own eyes a good five ton of gold put aboard her, and he said he couldn't sleep at nights for thinking of all that stuff stowed away somewhere close to him.

"HE ASKED the skipper if he wasn't scared of shipping a gang aboard some voyage who'd have a try at getting away with his cargo of bullion. And the Old Man laughed at him. Pirates was clean out of date, he said, so Steen pointed out that there were some pretty tough lads knocking about still. Those birds who dynamited that Chicago bank the other day, for instance, and even held up the police with bombs and a machine gun. They got away with it, too, and Steen wanted to know what the Old Man thought he was going to do if he woke up one voyage and found a crowd of toughs like that starting their dirty work aboard of him.

"The skipper had to admit then that he supposed he wouldn't be able to do much of anything; but, he says, nor would the other chaps either. They might take charge of the ship and break into the strong room; but that wouldn't do them any good, because, how were they going to get away with the boodle?

" 'They can't get over the side,' says the Old Man, 'and walk off with it. And it's pure childishness to think of their having a pirate steamer handy these days. And even if they had she wouldn't last five minutes. She'd get caught for a certainty.

"He'd forgotten all about his wireless, Steen said, but just then he remembered it and said the first thing he'd do, of course, would be to send out an S O S as soon as the trouble started.

" 'We'd have every ship within range steaming up to see about it. And where,' says he, 'would your silly pirates be then?'

" 'Now that sounds reasonable,' says Steen. 'But, between you and me, Bill, that silly old fool doesn't know what he's talking about. He evidently hasn't given the matter the thought it deserves. Well, Bill, I have,' says Steen. 'I haven't thought about much else for a long while, as a matter of fact, and it looks to me as though a job like that would be simple. Suppose,' he says. 'Just suppose, for the sake of argument, that you and I, say, got hold of a good seaworthy little yacht in England. A ten tonner ought to be big enough, I should think; but I leave all that part of the thing to you. You and I would have to sail her down to Cape Town, and it seems to me that would be the hardest part of the whole business. But you say it can be done, so I'm willing to try it.

" 'When we got there we'd ship a couple of raw Cape boys as crew; and get hold of a pair for choice who couldn't speak English. We'd give it out that we were going to sail round to Durban. I'd stay quiet ashore for a while and grow myself a beard and a pair of whiskers. I'd change my name and book a passage home in the *Oronsay*. I'd pick that ship because I know my way about her, and old Porter, her skipper, is a simple sort of mug and he hasn't got much guts. I'd book the same berth I had last time. It's a single berth cabin on the upper deck, right alongside the wireless room. I'd have three of these Stokes bombs stowed away in my baggage, and there I'd be, all present and correct and ready to start in business. The next part of the job would be up to you.'

" 'Ho! Would it?' I says. 'I see what you're driving at, of course; but it's pretty thin so far. What's you and me sailing ourselves down to the Cape alone got to do with it anyway? And what do you think you're going to be able to do, all by yourself, aboard that mail steamer? And where do you fancy you're going to get your three Stokes bombs from? In fact, sir,' I says, 'if you'll allow me to say so, I wasn't born yesterday and I don't like having my leg pulled.'

" 'If you'll stop talking and listen to me you'll hear some sense for a change,' says Steen. 'I'd like you to grasp the fact that I've thought this scheme out. Right out, and there aren't any holes in it. I don't want to boast; but when you know me better you'll find that making mistakes isn't a thing I do very often. Take those bombs, for instance. Can you tell me, Bill, any reason on earth why we two shouldn't bury as many bombs as we want to, here and now? As a matter of fact that's just what we'll have to do. Say twenty boxes and one of the guns as well. We'll need it, as you'll understand in a minute if you'll listen to me and not interrupt so much.

" 'We'll bury a gun and the bombs, and we'll mark the place. And as soon as this silly war's over we'll come back and dig the things up again. A dark night, a couple of spades and a motor car are all we'll need for that job. And if we can't get them loaded aboard the yacht without anybody knowing about it, then I'll eat the lot. And that's the reason we've got to get a yacht and sail her down to the Cape alone. We can't do anything without the gun and the bombs, and the only way we can get them where I want them is by taking them there ourselves. How do you think we could manage it otherwise?'

" 'Pack 'em in cases, of course,' says I, very smart. 'Label 'em *fragile. Hair restorer. Use no hooks*, and ship 'em as freight in a steamer. What more do you want?'

" 'Not a job on the breakwater in a suit of broad arrows, anyway,' says Steen. 'Which is what we'd get if we tried such a mug's game as that. When the Cape Town customs opened up your cases you'd be badly in need of a hair restorer, I assure you, for the next ten years to come. Perhaps you'll listen to me now and shut up?'

"HE HAD me there, I'll admit, so after that I didn't butt in any more and he told me the whole damned scheme. He told me the whole business, and I want you to know I got a proper ear full. It sounded kind of foolish when he started; but, by the time he'd done, I could see plain he'd worked out a stunt that was regular armor clad, fool proof. And don't you fool yourself either he didn't mean to try it. You should have heard him. I wish you had. You'd have understood then that he'd made up his mind to bring the thing off whatever happened, and nothing on earth was going to stop him.

"As near as I can remember, the way he meant to work it was this: Ten days or so before the *Oronsay* was due to start home from Cape Town, I was to sail from Table Bay in the yacht, giving it out we were bound for Durban. I'd sail at night, because of course nobody was to know that Steen wasn't aboard too. He'd be lying low ashore, growing his whiskers and waiting for the steamer to start. I'd have two of the rawest Kaffirs we could get hold of aboard with me to help me work the yacht. On deck we'd carry a good big dinghy; and below, stowed away under our ballast, would be our Stokes gun and the bombs for it.

"Once out of sight of land I was to run the yacht away to the north'ard, being sure to keep her clear of all shipping, as it wouldn't do if anybody saw us going that way. I was to make for a position as near as dammit eight hundred and thirty miles from Cape Town and plum on the homeward bound steamer track; and I was to be lying to, waiting there by 4 P.M. on the Monday following the weekend the *Oronsay* sailed from the Cape.

"You'll see how Steen arrived at the

time and those figures if you'll remember the *Oronsay* is a sixteen knotter and that the mail boats always sail from Cape Town at noon on Saturdays to the dot. Eight hundred miles or so was quite far enough off the land to make it certain there wouldn't be any one else around when the yacht fell in with the steamer; and four o'clock was about the best time for the job because it wouldn't be long then getting dark after the dirty work started. And the sooner it got dark, of course, the less chance there was of some other ship butting in, maybe, and spoiling things.

"As soon as the *Oronsay* came in sight I was to hoist a distress signal.

" 'Which,' says Steen, 'will be pie for old man Porter. The silly old ass sports one medal on his manly chest already for saving life at sea. He's proud of it. And he'll see himself earning another one the minute you break out your signal of distress. He'll steam straight for you to find out what the matter is, and as soon as he gets close I want you to hoist the signal flags which mean "Heave to or I'll sink you." You think that's merely being theatrical, no doubt,' says Steen. 'But don't you believe it. It isn't. I want it done for reasons I fear you won't quite understand. Psychological reasons, Bill,' says he, as if I didn't know well enough that what he was after was to put the wind up Old Man Porter and the rest of his crowd.

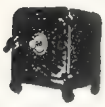
" 'Just give them time enough,' he goes on, 'to look your flags up in the signal book, and thirty seconds more, to allow things to sink in, and then let drive at them with the Stokes. Drop five or six bombs all along the forward deck, and some more right aft as well. But whatever you do don't put any amidships. Because,' says he, 'that's where I'll be. That, Bill, will be the moment for me to start sketching in those delicate little touches which make all the difference between a masterpiece and an ordinary common or garden job of work. We can't expect your shots,' he says, 'to do the ship much damage. They'll merely make a lot of noise, mess her up on deck a bit and knock out anybody who happens to be around there. But they will show old Porter that you aren't exactly joking. They'll make it perfectly clear to him we mean business and that you're actually shooting to kill. He'll find that simple fact hard to believe, because he thinks you can't do things like that nowadays. So we'll do 'em and open the old fool's eyes for him. And that'll shake him up, which is the effect I want, and he'll go all to pieces.

" 'When the show starts I'll be standing by in my cabin, and as soon as I hear your firing I'll set the time fuses of my three bombs and go into action too. I'll leave one bomb in my cabin, alongside the wireless room bulkhead. And when it explodes there won't be much left of that wireless outfit—or the wireless man either. The other two bombs I'll drop down the engine room skylight, thus tying the engines up in knots. If any one tries to interfere with me when I'm doing my piece I'll be rude to them with my two Colts. But the chances are there won't be any one knocking about on the top deck just then. Your shots will have sent them all diving for cover. And as for my three little mementoes, I hope and expect all hands will think they're some of your work, too.

" 'When you've pooped off a dozen rounds you must cease firing. The ship will then be stopped with her engines and wireless in a tangle and everybody panicking hard. Especially old Porter. He'll be a complete wreck, and I only hope to goodness we haven't frightened him to death by that time. Because that's the moment I show up on the bridge, with a gun in each hand, and begin to talk to him like a father.

" 'I'll tell him I've a gang of my men aboard who shipped as passengers like I did, and they're merely waiting for an order from me to shoot up all hands—crew, passengers and all the rest of them. I'll tell him what we're after is the gold in his strong room and, if he wants to save his ship, he'd better lower away one of his

boats, quick, and load her up with the bullion. I'd take out my watch then and give him thirty seconds to make his mind up. And he wouldn't take them all. I know the old man, and he'll weaken. He'll get off something about insuring the safety of the lives of those on board entrusted to his care. I shouldn't be surprised if the poor old ass didn't use those very words. He'll do what I tell him, anyway, and the rest will be easy.



" 'IF ANYTHING goes wrong you'll hear me shooting, and you'll have to stand by in the yacht to pick me up, because I'll go over the side and swim for it. We'd have to clear out then and do the best we could to save our necks, which in that case wouldn't be worth much. But it'll never come to that. Don't you worry. Just put yourself in the other man's place, in the same situation, which includes, don't forget, the business end of my Colt pressed well into your stomach, and also a nasty mess or two to gaze at spread all about the fore deck where some of the hands have been scuppered.

" 'Why, you'd lower away that boat and get it loaded in a hurry. You know you would. And, what's more, you'd be glad to get out of the mess at the price. It wouldn't be *your* gold, remember; and you wouldn't have any doubts about whose stomach it was the muzzle of my Colt was jammed into.

" 'You'll know on the yacht that things are going all right as soon as you see the lifeboat being lowered. That will be your cue to get the yacht's boat into the water. You'll load her up with all the bombs you've got left, and there ought to be about forty of them. One of them will be fitted with a special time fuse which I'll have fixed up for you before you left Cape Town. You'll have to take care to stow that particular bomb well in the middle of the rest where it's likely to do the most good.

" 'As soon as the gold is all loaded aboard the steamer's boat I'll tell Porter the yacht will be sending her own boat alongside him in a minute or so to take away me and my men. I'll mention, too, that you're standing by to shell him all along his waterline and sink him if there's any signs of hanky-panky while we're getting away. Then I'll get aboard the life boat myself and cast her off. When you see I've drifted well clear of the steamer you'll have to set that special bomb to go off, say, in ten minutes.

" 'It'll be up to you to judge the proper time for that, though. You'll put your two Kaffirs into the yacht's boat and tell them to pull alongside the steamer. Soon after they get there, if you've judged the time properly, those bombs will explode. And when they go off they ought to pretty well blow the *Oronsay* out of the water. They'll smash half her side in anyway, and that's bound to sink her. And then— Well, there we are. All the evidence destroyed and no witnesses left —not even our two Kaffirs. If there is any one left swimming about afterwards we can easily knock them on the head, or shoot 'em. After which we'll make sail and push off for Durban as fast as we can. The bullion is all in handy sized bars, just like pigs of iron ballast, so we'll disguise each bar with a coat or two of red lead and tar and stow it in place of our ballast, which we'll chuck overboard. The Stokes will then vanish over the side, too.

" 'When we get to Durban we'll make a song about what a terrible time we've had. We'll have come through a gale of wind off the Cape, I think, which held us up a couple of weeks and nearly sunk us and which did wash our dinghy and the two Kaffirs overboard. A horrible time we'll have had and the papers are certain to make a fuss about us. When the excitement blows over we'll smuggle the gold ashore. It'll be easy. Durban Bay's a big place and the local yachts go sailing about all over it, so it won't look queer or attract any attention to us at all if we take the yacht up some handy creek or other and lay her up there.

" 'After that there'd be nothing to prevent us walking ashore with some of the gold whenever we felt like it. We'd do

that part at night, taking our time over it—a couple of bars at a time in a suit case each, say. And if any one ever did see the stuff—which we'd take good care they didn't—they'd only think it was ballast, because don't forget we've taken the trouble to disguise it.

" 'The hardest part of the whole business will be getting rid of the gold; but even that job's simple. You'll understand you can't go selling raw gold in the Cape unless the authorities know where you got it from and all about it. So we'll have to hire a house ashore where we can pack up the stuff in comfort and turn it into cases of mining machinery. The machinery we'll take up-country to that claim of mine I told you about in German-East. And when we get it there we'll melt it down and use it bit by bit to stimulate the output of our diggings. It will take us a year or two to get rid of it all like that; but we'll have to lump that and take our time, otherwise people might get suspicious. I've got a mighty rich little claim up there, you see; but it wouldn't do to make it too rich.'

"Well, that was the lot, and I've given it to you, as near as I can remember, in Steen's own words, to let you see for yourself what a cold hearted murdering swine Steen was. I tell you it wouldn't have made any difference to him if he'd known his own mother was aboard that ship. He'd have blown her up and drowned her along with the rest without even troubling to change his grin.

"When he'd told me it all he was quiet for a spell, and just sat there, quite still, looking at me. I don't know if you've ever met one of those real bad men yourself; but if you have you'll know there's a look about them—there's something about their eyes. A snake's got it, too. When they look right at you, hard, it sort of gives you the shivers. Anyhow, that's how Steen was looking at me then, and I didn't like the feel of it. And to know what it was he was thinking about didn't make me feel any more comfortable either.

"YOU SEE, he'd just put his life in my hands, so to speak, and I knew he was making up his mind whether it was going to be safe to leave it there. And a man who'd blow up a ship full of women and babies without turning a hair isn't going to burst into tears over shooting any one he thought might be going to give him away. I knew very well if Steen began to have any doubts about me he'd do me in without making any more fuss than you would over squashing a mosquito. So I put on my poker face and tried to do some quick thinking.

" 'That's right,' says Steen then. 'You think it over. Think it over well. But you won't find any holes in it. As far as man can make it it's fool proof, and you know it. However, you take your time. And when you've made up your mind to come in you let me know. A small risk and a big fortune, Bill. What more do you want?' And with that he gave me the look again I've been telling you about, only this time it seemed to go clean through me. 'You're the one man I need for the job—if I haven't made any mistake, that is,' he says. 'And you mustn't go back on me now, of course—after all I've told you. I hope you won't, anyway,' he says, 'because, if you do it will be— Well, lets call it a calamity. A calamity for both of us, Bill.'

"After that he left me. He didn't say any more. He didn't need to. No. I could see what he was hinting at all right and I knew it was going to be a mighty sight riskier to back out then than to go through with the thing and join him. Well, he'd told me to think it over, and I tell you I spent the rest of that day doing it. I thought so hard I sweated. Or maybe it was just funk. Anyhow, I remember I sweated cold and plentiful. And it wasn't till after we'd finished our rounds that night, and he and I were coming back down the communication trench, that I suddenly did see clear what it was I'd got to do.

"It was quiet up the line that night. Not much doing, except the sentries

shooting off at nothing like they used to. And black dark, too, with only a Very light here and there to make you think you could see. Steen was ahead of me, and I couldn't see him, but I could hear his boots sucking and squashing in the mud. Just then a bullet went *smack*, mighty close to my ear, and that reminded me we were in a very bad piece of trench. I think the Jerries had got a fixed rifle laid on to it or something, because they'd managed to snipe quite a few of our fellows in just that spot. And Steen must have known as well as I did it was a most unhealthy place to be hanging around in; but, all the same, he chooses that bit of trench to stop and ask me what I'd made up my mind to do. I heard him turn round and face me.

" 'Well,' he says, 'what about it? You've enough time to make up your mind. What's your answer. Let's have it.'

"So I let him have it then. I could see the gleam of his teeth and eyes in the dark, and I fired at them.

"He went out quick and quiet. Just jerked about in the mud for a bit and then he was still. And when I turned him over I found out why. I'd got him in the mouth; but the bullet had mushroomed and blown all the back of his head away. I couldn't see, you understand, but I could feel that much. It wasn't nice, but I didn't mind it, because I was thinking of him rowing about in our dinghy and bashing in the heads of any of the *Oronsay's* people who was left. So I didn't much mind the feel of his head.

"And you needn't look at me like that, brother. It wasn't murder—whatever the law says. The law don't allow hanging a man until after the crime's been done. Which ain't sense. So I shot Steen before the murdering started. And I know I did right. But if it'll ease your mind at all you can say I did it in self-defense. Steen left me proof of that. His revolver wasn't in his holster. When I felt around for it I found it in his hand—with his finger still on the trigger."

THE BIG man fell silent while he slowly filled his pipe and lighted it. The little flame he sheltered in the hollow of his hand shone in the darkness like a brave and tiny torch. It showed for a moment a face that was calm, untroubled and serene. And then it went out. The ship's bell struck—four confident double beats ringing through the night, and out of the darkness above us came the clear hail of the lookout—

" 'All's well!'

"That's right," said the large man. "All's well it is—thanks to me. I wonder, though, what they'd do if they knew it? What do you think?"

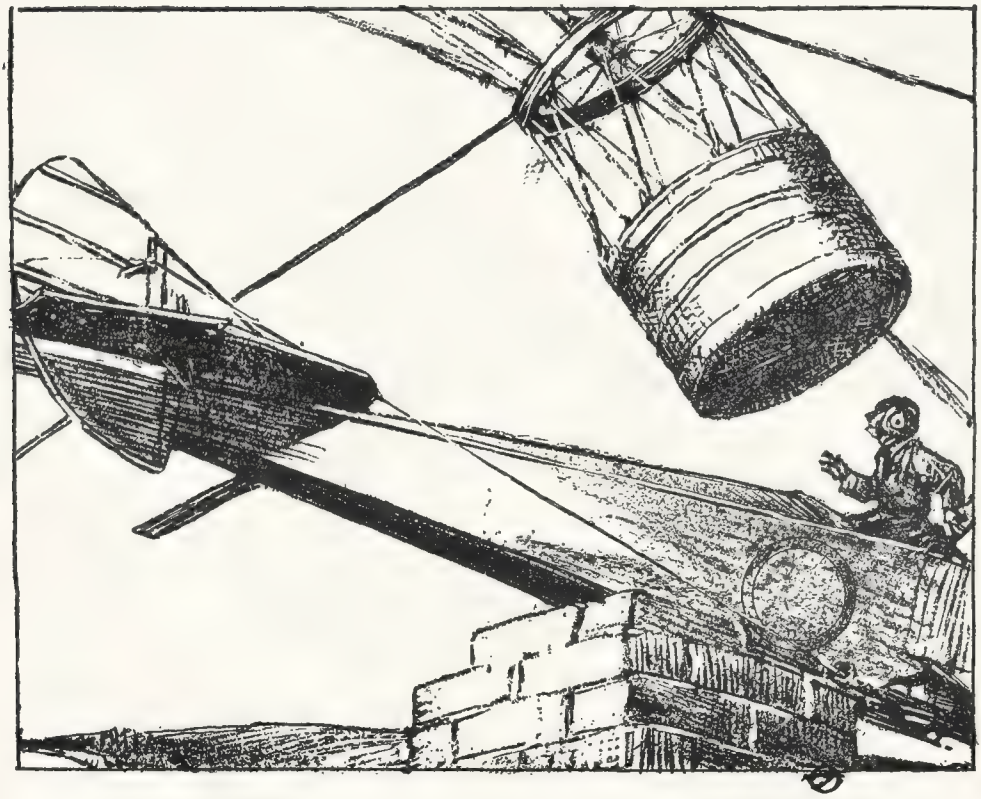
"I think, my friend," said I, "that you did well. But I shouldn't talk about it too much if I were you. If you do they'll probably hang you for shooting your officer, and that would be a poor reward for all your trouble."

"It would," said the large man. "The reward of virtue is apt to be a kick in the stomach. That's why I'm arranging my own reward this time. Steen let on where that little claim of his was located. I'm bound there now. And I reckon a patch of pay dirt that pans out a hundred pennyweight to the ton is about all the reward I'll need."

A Story of the Army Flyers

By

ANDREW A. CAFFREY



MAJOR KING was a tall quiet fellow who wore both glasses and goggles while flying. Certainly a flight surgeon must have been very lenient when the major was put on status but, on the other hand, Major King never claimed to be much of a pilot.

"When it comes to a matter of aviating," the major would smile and say, "there are several things that I do better. But, fellers, I can't think of anything that I like better. So if I break a tailskid now and then, or crack a landing gear worse and more often than the younger lieutenants, don't be too hard on me. Any time you mechanics think that I'm causing too much trouble, let me know and I'll eliminate myself . . . And I mean that. Don't hesitate to let me know."

"When we crab about Kingie's breakage," the A. A. P. mechanics said, one to the other, "the cockeyed world will know it. The King can do no wrong."

The A. A. P.—All-American Pathfinder—was an Army recruiting unit doing a coast-to-coast mission. Out of New York—Hazelhurst Field, Long Island—it

To Each Man His Game

was headed for the Pacific, via Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, through Chicago. and on and on.

The A. A. P. represented all Army branches. A truck convoy of some thirty-odd vehicles carried upward of two hundred enlisted men and officers, while the Air Corps unit, under Major King, hopped from stop to stop in nine of those awful planes designated as J. N. 6H's—or Jennies. The Jennies were nine to begin with, but they were like the fabled black crows sitting in a row, and from time to time one or more flew away never to return. Truth of the matter is, the A. A. P. pilots hung those bad Jennies in trees as fast as they could find trees. And New York and Pennsylvania States have never had any shortage of trees. To all this treeing of Government equipment, Major King shed what looked like crocodile tears—behind both pairs of lenses—and said, "Too bad."

You see, everybody knew that Air Corps Headquarters should never have sent this type of plane out on such a mission. If the pilots did not account for those ships while the going was good, well, the ships would surely account for the pilots when the going, far out West, got bad. Our flying birds are wise birds.

Major King was one of the first to wash a Jenny off the books. He did the trick near Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

With the major at the time was a first rate flying sergeant, Jack Smith. An uncommon name for an uncommonly fine enlisted pilot. The day of the crash was bad, and they had to look long and anxiously before Lebanon came through the clouds. Their Jenny's very limited gas supply was just about done. The first field to show itself was field enough for them. The landing was made in spite of two stone walls, a row of trees and a misplaced farm building. All four of the major's windows were broken. Sergeant Jack Smith—being in the front seat where the pilot should be—collected a few minor cuts. At sunset they came into Harrisburg, where was the waiting convoy, and told about it.

"You're some damn' hot pilot, Smithie," the other mechanics kidded. "And—"

"Just a minute," Major King cut in. "That ship was in my name. I was handling the controls, and the crash goes in against my records. The sergeant went down bravely, and I apologize for putting him in danger."

That was King. And that was a gang of very white lies. Not a man there thought for a minute that the major would ever jeopardize Smith's life by handling the controls where the going was bad. And the going had been bad. The other planes, with a few forced landings, had fought their way through; and the outfit knew that that sky had been too much for the major. His enlisted pilot had done well to save their necks. What kidding Smith might have received would never have hurt him, but a flying record is a flying record, and an enlisted man is an enlisted man, and it behooves an enlisted stiff to be careful. Smith, to open the sack and free the cat, really had no right handling a ship on cross-country. He was a good flyer through grace of stolen flying hours. At that time, with enlisted men who flew, it was a case of—"You can fly around the field on stolen time just so long as you get away with it,

but the minute you pull a boner—Lord help you!"

Now the A. A. P's ten airplane mechanics had been culled from almost as many different outfits. Before taking the road they did not know each other and, except for Sergeant Smith, they did not know Major King. But from the hour King and Smith arrived in Harrisburg, the plane unit realized that a sort of super man was wearing the oak leaves in that party. This guy King, with his slow smile and seemingly endless tolerance, was a new sort of a duck. The gang began to salute without pain. And the man a Yank salutes, willingly, must be a man "just a little lower than the angels."

For a week or so the A. A. P. tried its darnedest to grab a few recruits in Harrisburg. Captain Jonas, in charge of the lighter-than-air unit, kept his observation balloon at the end of its cable all week long. The captain was flying this kite from a downtown park. What the captain was really doing was getting in his flying time for the month. All airmen, plane pilots and balloon pilots alike, must put in so many hours per month in order to draw their flying pay which is a twenty-five per cent. increase over base pay. It is worth spending ten hours a month even at the end of a cable in a downtown park. And while the captain was observing what was going on in nearby office windows, from his downtown perch, the airplane pilots were getting in their August time from a field out toward Dillsburg. A merry Army life was being had by all.

THE AIRPLANE mechanics, always a choice gang of grease monkeys, had a staff car of their own. This provision was made in order that they might be able to go here and there, anywhere at any time, and service ships in trouble. These mechanics with their big car tried, whenever it was possible, to keep away from the truck convoy. For the most part, they, the mechanics, were ex-overseas men. They had had enough of circus life. Of course the rolling kitchen was with the trucks, but it is a poor soldier who can not rustle his own. And these same macs would have been ten poor soldiers if they needed any help.

When the outfit was all set to shove west out of Harrisburg, Major King came to where these mechanics were resting under a lower wing and said:

"When we pull out of here, you boys, with Sergeant Smith along, will have eleven men in your staff car. I've seen twelve and fifteen men ride in the same vehicle. Now, if it's all the same to you boys, I'd like to move along with you . . . Ah, ah!—don't say a word. I know I'm an officer and my place is with the officers but, as I said, I'd like to move with you boys. You see, you men, whenever you feel like it, are camping along the line. Fellers, all my life I've wanted to do that thing. Would you believe it, I've never spent a night on the ground.

"Now if you'll let me come along I'll promise to do my bit. I'll pick wood for the fire and I'll skin spuds. We'll speak the same language and, once free of the convoy, there'll be no Army. It's up to you men. How are you going to decide?"

"The thing's been decided," Master-sergeant Nichols, in charge of mechanics, said. "You're first wish was our final decision, Major. Now, being the rankest ranking non-com of these rank high ranking mechanics, I detail myself a party of one to go down to the convoy and bring back your blanket roll. And so saying, I go." And Nichols went.

Till now nothing much has been said of the A. A. P's pilots. Strange, but they hardly enter the story at all. In that they spent most of their time off the ground, there was no way of putting a check on their actions. Theirs was one world. The ground mechanic's another. Both worlds met while the planes were "in work," then they busted apart again on the take-off. Always, the A. A. P's pilots and mechanics pulled together, and they might have flown poor ships around the world, were it not for the mud loving truck convoy. But among the pilots were: Lieutenants George Wise, Stanley Boggs, Barney

Tooher, Adams, McDonnell and a few others of Air Corps' best and bravest. Man, they had to be brave to *pole* Jennies the way they did. And last but not least among the pilots was Slim Rector.

Rector, just before the outfit pulled out of New York, had taken unto himself one wife. The girl—oh! for the power of a lavender pen—was a darb. And, honeymooning along the way, she was traveling by rail and managing to keep up with Slim.

"A sweet kid," Major King often remarked. "But this isn't my idea of a fine way to spend the first month after the big bow. My gosh, what if Slim was to get bumped. That boy should have asked for a leave of absence. Life at its best is darned uncertain. And an aviator's bride is the world's supreme optimist." The major always spoke of Mrs. King thus, too.

The eight planes, with warming motors, were awaiting Major King's say-so, the word that would send them on to Pittsburgh. The truck convoy had gone an hour ago. A few thousand spectators lined up behind the ships. Slim Rector stood near the nearest ship to the mechanics' staff car and busily spoke another goodby to his bride. The back seats of each craft, through inter-branch courtesy, had been given over to officers of the convoy. Later, when colder weather should set in, the mechanics would do all the deadheading. At the last minute, the major, after studying Rector's forced break away, called his flying sergeant, Smith, to one side. They talked for a few seconds. The other mechanics waited and speculated. Then Smith pulled his helmet and goggles from an inner pocket, and the two walked toward Rector's plane.

"I hope," Corporal Wedicamp of the mechanics said, "that the major ain't going to ask no jane to ride with us in this staff car. We don't want no women along . . . I hope to hell he ain't."

"He ain't," Master-sergeant Nichols smiled. "Don't worry, Corporal. There'll be no ladies along to vamp you."

"Lieutenant Rector and Mrs. Rector," the major was saying, "you two get somebody to drive you to the railroad. Any of these spectators will gladly do it. Sergeant Smith is going to fly this plane . . . Now, no argument, Slim. There's no war on, and there's no hurry. Why should Mrs. Rector be traveling alone, in a dusty train, while you are enjoying all the fresh air? Don't be selfish, Slim. Get gone now." The Rectors laughed and departed.

The flight took off; and the staff car wheeled out of Harrisburg. And if you were to see those boys drive that big staff car, you would say it wheeled. Why, flying was tame.

Between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh the A. A. P. lost another plane. It hit wires, high tension, and burned up on the racetrack at Altoona. Neither pilot nor passenger was hurt.

In turn, Columbus, Ohio, Indianapolis and way stations were visited. Chicago found the A. A. P. with four ships still in service. Score: Four up, five down, and no lives lost. That is close to perfect. But a few days later the score at Milwaukee was: three up, six down, and no lives lost. With perfection coming closer. Also, winter was in view, for this thing had taken weeks. And the A. A. P. was beginning to weaken.

CAMPING along the line, the major and his boys had enjoyed life. For days and days at a time, they had managed to keep clear of the convoy. Fact is, they hardly knew a man of that creeping unit.

"It suits me fine," the major would say. "The less we see of them the better I like it. Too much soldiering in those branches. My gosh, they forget that the war is over."

October was on hand and nasty snows were blowing when the A. A. P. went through Wisconsin toward St. Paul. And by the time the planes—there were two now—arrived in the Twin Cities, the convoy was spread all over the map. Trucks were mired deeply in places where Wis-

consin now has good roads. Chances are, and there is no record to the contrary, some of those trucks are still under the present good roads, or through to China. Among the missing trucks, the most loudly lamented was Captain Jonas' heavy balloon winch; and what is the use of owning a balloon if you have no winch? To hear the captain lament you would suppose the winch was related to him.

"I've got to get that winch," Captain Jonas would cry in the transportation officer's ear. "How will I get in my flying time for October? Can't you do something, Lieutenant? Can't you send the outfit back in cars and dig out my winch?"

"It'll all come out in the wash, Captain," the transportation officer promised. "One thing at a time. First, I've got to get the rolling kitchen here before these enlisted men starve."

"But that can wait. They can wait," Captain Jonas cried. "But my winch, my flying time, my—"

"T'hell with you and yours, Captain!" the transportation officer yelled.

And said officer was only a lieutenant too. But the outfit, under hard going, had gone haywire. Men said what they thought, regardless of rank, and charitable organizations were furnishing the handouts.

Dame Rumor, the only wild eyed female allowed in Army areas, said that this was going to be the last stand of the A. A. P.

"I'm not sure," Major King told his men, "but it looks very much as though we'll ride back East on the velvet. No doubt, we'll tear down these two ships and send them by box car. In the meantime, you pilots bring your flying time up to scratch. Hop to it now. How are you fixed for hours?"

Each of the pilots needed a few hours. Slim Rector was not among those present, but one of the mechanics, who kept the log, said that Slim needed six hours.

"That's my fault," the major said. "I've been keeping him away from his airwork too much. Somebody see if they can locate Slim."

The A. A. P., during this Twin City stay, was located out at Fort Snelling. The drill ground was used as a flying field. There was snow on the ground, and an early winter had arrived to stay.

A mechanic went looking for Rector. The others started the two motors. Then, with the ships ready, the pilots hung back and stalled.

"What's holding you boys?" Major King asked.

"You," one of the pilots laughed. "How about your flying time, Major? You haven't got in any this month."

"Bless your great big kind heart," the major laughed. "Don't any of you boys wait for me."

"But we will!" another said with emphasis. "You're top man here, and you're a major, and you're everything else; but, by hell, you're not going to give us all the gravy. We're damn' tired of your endless giving, giving, giving, and our equally endless taking, taking, taking."

The major laughed some more at that. He pulled the entire flying group a little closer to him, then spoke:

"Now, listen, fellers. I'm rated as a pilot. I wear these brave chest wings." He slapped his brevet sharply. "And I like to think that I can handle a ship, after a fashion. Pretty good, I'll say, for an old stiff like me." The major was perhaps in his middle forties. "But, fellers, I look upon my flying as a great gift from my great country. It's a privilege. Do you see what I mean? As an effective pilot, why, I'd be a joke. What would you young squirts think of me if you supposed that I classed myself with you? Do you think that I think this U. S. A. should pay me for the flying I do? Good heavens, no! That's my point, fellers. I've never drawn a flying pay. Why, my gosh, it would be robbery."

No man in that group had ever before met an officer, fat, forty or otherwise, too proud, or big enough, to refuse a flying pay. It has always been the curse of our Air Corps: too many swivel chair pilots. These men can fly. That covers the law.

So they draw the pay. There is only so much pay available, and hence, for every useless, so called flyer, America is cheated of a prospective young ace.

"Now, rise and fly," the major concluded. "I'm going back to headquarters and see what I can see."

HARDLY had Major King quitted the field before Captain Jonas came upon the scene. The captain spoke to Master-sergeant Nichols.

"Sergeant," he said. "I want to get in seven hours and twenty minutes of flying time. When will a plane be available?"

"Well," the sergeant answered, and tried not to laugh, "all these lieutenants, Captain, are trying to get in their time. You see, we expect to lose these planes any time now, and the boys must make hay while the sun shines. They're all shy a few hours, and Lieutenant Rector needs all of six. I don't know when you'll get a chance, sir."

"I'll climb into the back seat of the next plane that lands, Sergeant," the captain answered.

"But, Captain," the sergeant said, "Major King turned these two planes over to the lieutenants. It is his orders. Till I see the major—"

"Send for the major," Jonas interrupted.

The sergeant dispatched one of his mechanics. The group waited. Five minutes later, Major King was back at the field.

The major and Jonas talked. After a few minutes, still smiling, the major gathered his men once more. "Captain Jonas," he said, "tells me that he ranks any lieutenant in my unit. Now, fellers, that's your fault—why the devil weren't you all captains?

"Anyway, boys, the captain ranks you. This is the Army. The captain wants to ride, needs his flying time, and the captain can demand it. You'll see that he has a seat in the next plane to land. After that, try to get as much time as you can. See you later."

The mechanics were using a small shed just off the field for a tool house. Two or three of them were sitting around a stove therein, five minutes later, when Captain Jonas crossed the threshold, blinked in the dim light, and asked whether any one there could, or would, let him take flying equipment—helmet, goggles and coat. Each of the mechanics was equipped with these articles. One set was hanging on a peg within reach of the captain. When the captain asked, all three mechanics answered—

"No can do. No got, Captain."

"Well," Jonas said, "to whom do these flying togs belong?" He pointed at the hanging outfit.

"They're mine," Corporal Pugh answered.

"Can I use them, Corporal?" the captain asked.

"If it's an order, sir," Corporal Pugh shot back, "you can."

"In other words," Jonas barked, "if it isn't an order, you'd sooner I wouldn't use them?"

"Yes, sir," Pugh answered simply.

"All right, Corporal," the captain said, and he went away from there.

The day was too cold for aerial work without proper equipment. Even Jonas knew when he had had enough. Talking to himself, he kept going and left the field. A gang of macs and pilots laughed up a gang of sleeves.

"What the devil is this here man's Army coming to?" a lieutenant yelled. "An awful buck corporal marks a full sized captain 'on the ground'."

"And gets away with it!" Corporal Pugh cried. "Gang, I'm brave. Never had such fun before in all my life. 'Let me take your flying gear', the captain says to me. 'Go to hell, Captain', I says to him. And he goes. Hurrah for me!"

That, for the time being, was that.

By then the early darkness had put a stop to flying operations, and all pilots present had managed to run up the few needed hours of air work. Slim Rector had failed to show up. One of the two planes, because of "blowing" valves, was

marked "out of commission" by Master-sergeant Nichols.

"Will we put in new exhaust valves?" the sergeant exclaimed when one of the pilots suggested the repair. "Not a chance. There'll be no more work done on these crates. All our motor parts are in the supply truck, and the truck in question was last seen going down, in the mud, just northwest of Winona.

"If Slim Rector gets out bright and early in the A.M., well, maybe he can get in his six hours or so by flying a working stiff's day. But six hours is a lot to turn out . . .

"Throw covers on those motors, gang, and let's go; and you, High-corporal Pugh, lay off all balloon captains if we meet any between here and quarters—'Can I take your flying equipment, Corporal?' the kind kite captain asked. 'Like hell you can, kind sir!' the rough enlisted bloke made answer . . .

"Pugh, you're going to give heavier-than-air a devil of a bad name."

"Well, what could I do?" Corporal Pugh laughed. "The flying gear that Jonas asked for wasn't mine. No, that coat, helmet and goggles belongs to the balloon unit. That last day we were all together, back in Milwaukee, the captain's sergeant threw the whole works into our staff car and asked me to keep an eye on 'em. But if it had been an order, Jonas could have used them. I'm big hearted and broad minded, if I do say it myself."

IN THE officers' mess that same evening, Captain Jonas dined lavishly on razzberry sauce, which is nowhere near as nice as applesauce. Yes, his fellow officers gave him a ride. The captain was not of a rideable temperament, and being kidded because of an enlisted man's fast stuff was hard for the captain to take. The balloon man made two rash statements, one rasher than the other. He said—

"I'll get in that damn' flying time tomorrow if every one of King's trash have to sweat blood, and my time will come first!" All of which was within the captain's rights. But when the irate cable stretcher added, "And I'll screw down on that Corporal Pugh before I'm through!" the same captain had said one thing too many.

Major King, hearing the captain, raised his eyebrows and swallowed a swallow. Then, with the meal ended, he took his after dinner stroll, this time toward the enlisted men's barracks.

"Corporal Pugh, I want to see you," the major said upon arriving. Pugh unraveled from his bunk and came to quick attention. "This afternoon, after I quit the field, you had a little run-in with Captain Jonas, so the pilots were telling me at dinner."

"Yes, sir," Corporal Pugh said. "I'm sorry, Major."

"For what?"

"If it in any way affected you, Major."

"I didn't come here to cry on your shoulder, Corporal," the major went on, "but only to tell you, that at mess just now, Captain Jonas said he was going to screw down on you before he got through. That, Corporal, is a criminal statement for any officer to make. If Captain Jonas bothers you in any way, you come to me.

"But, on the other hand, Corporal, and I know I don't have to warn you—don't add any more to this matter. My pilots say that you were entirely within your rights. We, Pugh, can settle our own family affairs, eh? Go back to your bunk. I'm going to mine. I don't feel well, Corporal. Truth of the matter is, I'm a very sick man. Good evening, Corporal."

"Good evening, Major," the corporal said.

When King had gone, Pugh paced the barracks for a long time.

"Why in hell," he finally asked the world, "couldn't I have met officers like Major King at the beginning instead of near the end of my Army career?"

And Pugh found no answer to that. There seems to be no answer. It's such a

big world of underlings that, of necessity, Kings must be few.

On his way back to officers' quarters Major King dropped in at the A. A. P's temporary orderly room.

"Just the man I want to see," Major Opie enthused. Opie was C. O. of the entire A. A. P. train. "Kingie," he continued, "I'm here to state that the notorious monstrosity, known officially as the All-American Pathfinder, is about to do a die."

"Sweet news," Major King agreed. He found a chair and, very gray of face, he needed a chair.

"As fast as we can get our trucks out of the mud," Major Opie explained, "we'll turn them in here at Fort Snelling, then railroad us back East. There'll be a box car spotted on the fort's siding in the morning for your two planes. That means you can wash out the air work any time you see fit . . . What's wrong with you, Kingie—you look like the very devil?"

"Just an old complaint, Opie. Stomach. Too much damn' Chinese cooking in the old days, I guess. Well, I'll be going to my blankets. See you in the morning."

Before turning in, the sick man encountered one of his pilots.

"Just a second, Harry," he said. "Will you find as many of the pilots as are in quarters and bring them to my room? Get Sergeant Nichols too. I've got a nice bedtime story to tell. No more big bad bears will be preying upon the poor A. A. P. airmen.

"And see if Slim Rector has returned. My gosh! This honeymoon stuff should allow a breathing spell now and then."

Fifteen minutes later Major King was talking from his bed to Slim Rector, five other pilots, and Sergeant Nichols.

"Now never mind me," he told them. "I'm just lazy and like my bunk. What I want to say to you boys is this—the A. A. P. has curled up and died. I understand that, except for Lieutenant Rector, every pilot has made his flying time for this month. That being the case, just as soon as the lieutenant has flown his six hours or so, you, Sergeant Nichols, can knock down the two planes and free your men for bigger and better things, such as sightseeing.

"I'm going to stick right close to these warm blankets for a while. You boys get busy in the morning and clean up that bit of flying and, oh, by the way, Captain Jonas, very insistent devil that he is, still counts on getting in his time too. Lieutenant Rector can carry him, which, of course, is up to the lieutenant. Anyway, I'll leave the whole works to you boys."

"Major, and gang," Slim Rector said, "if I'm the only guy holding up the parade, there'll be no flying tomorrow. The whole cock-eyed world knows that I need the cash, but I should have been on hand today, and any time I ask a bunch of mechanics to stand around in the snow and cuss me all day, you'll know it."

Master-sergeant Nichols said—

"It's no imposition at all, Slim. I can handle your plane alone. Now you come out and get in your time."

"No!" Rector yelled. "K-n-o-o— No! I won't prolong the agony of this half starved, entirely frozen outfit for a single hour . . . Anyway, I wouldn't fly for six hours a day in such weather, and in such a ship, for all the jack on earth. Hell, gang, think I'm going to batch it for six whole hours? You stags must have surely drunk your fill to get a crazy idea like that!"

"Say, Major, can't we do anything for you?" The major said:

"Yes. Go out and celebrate."

CAPTAIN JONAS was on the field early next morning; but Nichols and his men had been earlier. And one plane, the ship whose motor was yet in fine order, had been entirely dismantled when the captain put in his appearance. The boys were just about to lay heavy hands upon the second ship, the one with the "blowing" valves. And when airplane mechanics do place heavy hands—hammers and wire cutters—upon a ship, a ship which

they expect never to see or handle again, their action is very close akin to that of a wrecking crew. They take great pleasure in the speed with which they can make a plane come apart.

"What does this mean?" Captain Jonas demanded.

"All flying," Nichols told him, "has been washed out. We're getting set to ship these planes. Major King's orders, sir."

"Not so fast!" the captain sneered. "I told King that I wanted my flying time, and I'll get that time. Where are the pilots?"

"Heaven only knows," Nichols answered. "Nary a one has showed up this morning. Chances are, they're packing and getting ready to pull out."

"I want a pilot," Jonas stated. "I'm not going to lose a month's flying pay. They got theirs, and I'll get mine."

"Lieutenant Rector didn't get his, sir," Nichols said. "He didn't want to make the boys work any longer in the cold and wet. Working planes in such weather is awful mean stuff, sir."

"Sergeant," the captain ordered, "hold up this wrecking work. Call your men off that plane."

"But this plane isn't airworthy, sir. It has three blowing exhaust valves. The motor turns up less than 1200 revs per minute."

"Balderdash!" Jonas bit off. ("Fifth Avenue for ye olde applesauce," Corporal Pugh explained to somebody.) "If these pilots wanted to fly for fun, that motor would be all right. Now, must I go and see King, or can you handle this flight for me, Sergeant?"

Off to one side, Flying-sergeant Smith and the others were listening.

"Smithy," Pugh suggested, "why can't you take that guy up and discourage him? We don't want him running to the major. The major's a sick man. Them's his own words. Go ahead; you give him the air."

Smith stepped out.

"I'll give the captain a ride," he said to Nichols. Nichols was quicker than the captain, and he noticed Smith's inflection when Smith said, a second time—

"I'll give the captain a *ride*."

"Good!" Jonas enthused. "Good!"

"Not so good," Corporal Pugh said to somebody. "Yes, the captain's going to get a ride."

"If the sergeant is willing to pilot me," Jonas said to Nichols, "I suppose the use of the plane will be all right with you, Sergeant Nichols?"

"Well," Nichols said, "I marked it out of commission, but I can give Sergeant Smith a pilot's choice and call the thing back to service. But it really isn't airworthy, Captain. And we'll call upon these men to bear witness that you ride in it by your own request and at your own risk."

"Content," the captain exclaimed.

When they gave the motor a run it showed a weak 1200 revolutions per minute on the tachometer reading. The entire force watched the run.

"That," Pugh said, "will get the wheels out of the snow, but not through the field side trees. But we should worry—what's a balloon captain or two, among heavier-than-air friends?"

"Climb aboard, Captain," Sergeant Smith said to Jonas.

While the captain was adjusting his safety belt, a pair of Fort Snelling's regulars stopped near the plane. Smith throttled his wheezing motor a little lower and yelled—

"Hey, soldiers, what kind of a post hospital have you here?"

"Not too bad," one of the men answered. "This is Saturday. If you get in right now, you'll have chicken for dinner tomorrow—if they have chicken tomorrow."

Captain Jonas looked up from his cockpit. He motioned for Sergeant Smith to lean back.

"Why did you ask that, Sergeant?" he inquired.

"Just wanted to know," Smith shot back. "Are you all set? Let's go."

The Fort Snelling drill ground in use was on the west bank of the Mississippi.

The field space, too limited for actual airplane use, is surrounded on all five sides by high trees. The river bed is well below the fort's level. And when a plane takes off, with its take-off direction toward the river, said plane, once clear of the ground, must keep going. Beyond the river there are more and bigger trees. It is a layout over which a pilot needs a good motor. That day the wind was from the east, a stiff wind too, and Smith had no second choice. With his tail group under the west side trees, the sergeant belted full gun to his motor and hoped for the best.

NOWADAYS they talk about ships getting their wheels off the ground in five or ten seconds. Maybe. A Jenny was never that way. A Jenny was the most earth-earthly thing on record; and even bucking a cyclone, this type of craft would take its good time about leaving solid ground. Smith's craft crawled east across Snelling's field.

And, slowly, the great Mississippi, without moving an inch, came closer. And the ground seemed to stay right where it was—hard up against Smithy's wheels.

The watchers held their breath.

"The captain," Corporal Pugh kept saying, "is about to take his ride. And the captain was—I use past tense advisedly—such a willing guy . . . Come on, Smithy, pull that cull off the ground."

When the trees were within fifty yards of the ship's nose, the lumbering craft bounced into the air for the first time. Smith took the bounce, held his nose down, then zoomed the most pepless zoom on record. The landing gear seemed to nestle for a moment among the naked branches of a tree; most certainly, the tail skid carried a bouquet of twigs away with it, and the ship stalled, bucking the wind, toward the river. Seconds later, the Mississippi was fifty or sixty feet below Smithy; and there is where the dirty work began.

As a rule you will find a very bumpy air condition above a river. At this time, because of late fall rains back at the great stream's headwaters, the bed was pretty well flooded. Also because of melting snows and slush, the river, low in its groove, was warmer than the surrounding country. All this went toward the making of a real bumpy reception for Smith and the captain.

"Oh, boy!" Corporal Pugh cheered when the first air wave tossed the ship. "One bald balloon captain is going to lose his cakes. Ride 'em, Smithy!"

Smith was riding 'em. He shoved his ship's nose down. Bumps, more bumps, heaved the craft. The wheezing, half powered motor rattled like so many tin cans and, fluttering, fluttering, the plane hardly held its own. The fact is, against the great wind, Smith seemed to be coming back toward Snelling, tail first.

But flying a Jenny tail first is very bad joss. Once you lose your nose with a Jenny, and especially when you are floundering at the grand elevation of forty or fifty feet, you are outa luck. Yes, you are just about counted off. Smith, however, was not the man to relinquish his number without an argument. The game has checked, and double checked, a lot of Smiths, but here was one Smith who had been warned.

He managed to keep that plane's nose down, and his power full on. And the ship seemed to stand on its propeller, while it waved a rudder to the passing clouds. And it bounced and tossed, yet made no headway. This condition, in spite of Pugh's fondest hopes, could not go on; and Sergeant Smith was in a position to appreciate the fact. With a last desperate hope, he shoved his nose lower, threw over his stick, kicked in right rudder, and headed half down-wind, and down stream. In a quick second, his plane was lower than the high river banks.

Now just off the southeast point of Fort Snelling, a two span, double arched bridge crosses the Mississippi River. The east side arch is a regular Southern California structure; that is, it bridges nothing but dry land. And into this arch have grown high trees. But the other

large arch crosses a real bit of river, with water in it. Toward this second and better arch Smith was headed, and a-helling, too. Through said arch he was going to fly. There was no other escape. Once below the bridge, he could nope to keep going and win altitude. The bridge came closer and, at the last second, poor Smithy discovered that a crew of bridge painters were working on a scaffold suspended in the arch. It was a fine situation; the right place for some fast thinking. Then again, now within a few hundred feet of the bridge, there was no time for thought. Maybe Smith could zoom the bridge. Smith zoomed.

Before this up to date, two arch steel structure spanned the river at this point, there used to be an old crossing about a hundred feet upstream. The old bridge has been removed; but the old bridge's high stone piers still stick out of the water like so many ancient battlements. Smith, never seeing the thing, hit one of these piers in mid zoom. Well, a flight ended there, because those old piers were made in a day when men were men and field stone plentiful. What the Mississippi hadn't done in years, one poor weak Jenny could not do in one rush, but something had to give, and it was modernity. The wild Jenny cracked up like the bad egg that it was.

When the hopeless, helpless moment had passed, the craft had broken into two component parts; and the parting of the ways had occurred just between pilot and passenger. But Smithy's end, carrying the heavy motor and entire wing assembly, followed the law of gravity, after the first breathless pause had passed, and plunked into the water some forty-odd feet below. The current at that point, just below the Minnehaha Falls, was plenty fast; so, instead of sinking forthwith, Smith's end swirled downstream. When it came under the arch, the painters began to think that something must be wrong. Here was an aviator in a plane, or part of a plane and, obviously, it wasn't a seaplane. Yes, something must be wrong, so they tossed Smith a line, in passing, and jerked him out of that mess. Lucky for the painters that they were there to help an aviator.

THE CAPTAIN'S end of the ship, with the captain still in his safety belt, remained atop the pier. For a man schooled to motionless observation, it was a perfect set-up, with just enough destruction in view to satisfy his warlike heart. But in no time at all, the balloon officer was yelling for, demanding, succor.

Shortly, the entire amused personnel of the A. A. P. was sitting on the river's high bank. Majors Opie and King were among the observers. All of Snelling's permanent party had rushed down to see what it could see and, strange to relate, a sort of carnival spirit filled the day. Yet, Captain Jonas could not see it that way. He waved and yelled. He gave orders and made suggestions. And the bankside watchers discussed all the many ways in which a man might be taken from such a position.

The pier was in deep water. Deep, rough, wintery water. Also, in that part of the river, just below the Minnehaha Falls, one finds a dearth of river craft. But then again, had they a boat handy, the problem of getting the captain from perch to boat would be no small matter. It required much silent study. The captain had acquired a dilemma. And he acted that way too.

All of a sudden, the officers present remembered that the Army was still in business. A Snelling major drove his men to cover; and Major Opie told the A. A. P. men to get gone from there and hold themselves ready for moving orders. Then in parting, Opie said:

"Well, Kingie, I guess you can handle this. I'll leave the rescue to you and your mechanics."

"Boys," Major King said to his mechanics when Opie had departed, "let's sit on our heels and invent ways and means of succoring the captain."

The men sat on their heels, lighted up smokes, and fell into profound thought.

"The captain," Major King now said, "has been in the air for about half an hour. He wanted about seven hours of air work when he started. We must keep this plan in mind and plan accordingly. Remember, the captain's air time goes right along. He's still off the ground. For a lighter-than-air man that is all that counts—that he be off the ground. Have any of you boys a good suggestion? Sergeant Smith wasn't hurt, was he? You say he went right to quarters? That's fine. Good boy, the sergeant. None better . . ." And time passed.

"Now, to get back to the captain. Anyway, I've got some paper work to do, and I'm going to leave this rescue work to Sergeant Nichols and you boys. Sure, you can handle it. Take your time. Do it right. And never forget that the captain lacked some seven hours air time, of which he has now had one hour and ten minutes. See you later, men. I don't feel well enough to stay out here."

"Anderson," Nichols said to one of his men, "you go and find the officer in charge of maintenance at the fort. See what he has in the line of rope. Don't bring it back, but just find out whether he has enough. Hump to it.

"Johnson," Nichols said to another, "you go to the fort garage and see if we can borrow a wrecking crane, if they have one. Don't bring it back. All right, drift.

"Clark," he said to a third, "go to a telephone, call up a newspaper and ask them what kind of weather is predicted for the next six hours. Make sure to note any real bad winds. Don't bring the weather back with you, but be sure you know where it is. On your way."

After that, with the first lines of battle assured, Master-sergeant Nichols, Corporal Pugh and the others returned to meditation. After a few minutes of meditation, and now and then a wave of the hand for Captain Jonas, Sergeant Nichols snapped to his feet and said:

"Pugh, inasmuch as I have started the ball a-rollin', I'm now going to leave this detail to you. There's a little matter that I've got to attend to in St. Paul. Use your own way, Pugh. But, as the major remarked, the captain's air time goes right along. If I'm correct, Jonas now has close to two hours official air work. At twelve, noon, knock off for mess. When you return, return eating pie if possible, just to show the captain that you are still thinking of him. Now and then give him a wave. All you men stand now and wave . . . There, that's fine. So long, and the best of luck."

FROM time to time, the boys waved to Jonas; and the rescue work went right along. There was no undue haste. When the mechanics returned from mess, shortly after one, the captain had more than three hours to his credit. And, from the bridge, Twin City newspaper cameramen were making photographic records of the work. The cameramen suggested calling the fire department. They thought that an extension ladder, working from the bridge, could swivel around and pick the marooned one out of mid-air.

It took Corporal Pugh a long time to talk the newspapermen out of this. He told them that it was unmilitary. He reminded them that the balloon corps has no use for the fire department. In the end, Pugh silenced all such bad suggestions, and the staff boys went away to catch their afternoon editions. The rescue was then well into its fourth hour. Some big hearted guy threw an apple to Jonas at two o'clock. To Jonas, that apple must have looked like the dove returning to the Ark. In making the catch, the captain nearly fell off the pier. The terpsichorean effort won a great cheer from the crowd. And more cheers came when a troop of Boy Scouts arrived from nowhere, on a Saturday hike, and began to look around for their opportunity for the day's good deed.

Without asking anybody, the troop fell to work cutting down saplings that grew in great profusion at the water's edge. In no time at all those kids might have had one of their trick bridges thrown out

to the captain had not Pugh begged, and demanded, that they allow him to do the military thing and carry out present plans.

"If your scouts want to help," Corporal Pugh added, splitting the difference, "why don't you get over there on the big bridge and kid the captain? Cheer him up. He likes scouts. He's a scoutmaster in his own home town. Go ahead, give him a cheer."

The troop went willingly; and when kids kid an out of luck guy, well, he is kidded.

There is no telling just what Corporal Pugh's plan of battle was. He and his men were moving here and there—to keep warm, perhaps—and doing this and that; but as yet no visible succor was extending outward toward the pier. Reports on rope and a wrecking crane had been received and, in turn, the ropes and crane had been procured. Also, a weather report had been relayed to Pugh: high and increasing winds to the east.

"Well," Pugh had said, "we got to get him off before those winds get too bad or we'll freeze out here in the open. He's been off the ground for five hours now. Flying time never came harder to any guy. They should pay the captain double. Bet he won't screw down on me very hard when he learns how I won his pay for him. Me and Captain Jonas are going to be buddies after this, or I'll buy you guys a hat apiece. I'm still open for suggestions, gang. Any of you guys got any idea how to pep this thing up?"

"Look," one of Pugh's men exclaimed. "Look what's coming across the bridge—a gang of our poor A. A. P. trucks."

"So help me!" Pugh cheered. "And the balloon winch is among 'em. The winch and gas tank trailer. And the balloon itself must be there. Let's go and head 'em off before they get into the reservation. If some fun isn't going to be had by all, then I'm all wrong. Follow me and deploy as thinkers."

Pugh and his worthies met the balloon unit's winch truck, et cetera, at Fort Snelling's gate. The winch's driver, a poor mud caked buck, pulled to one side of the drive.

"What d'ya want, Corporal?" he asked.

"Where's your sergeant—the bird in charge of the balloon?" Pugh asked.

"Him and the corporal dropped off at St. Paul. They told me to come here while they stayed behind to do some Saturday afternoon drinking. The sergeant used to be stationed here at Snelling. He knows St. Paul."

"Is the bag here?" Pugh asked.

"Everything's here," the buck told them, "except the sergeant and the corporal. An' I know them; they won't be back till it's over over there in St. Paul. We've been wet for two weeks but the sergeant and the corporal's awful dry. My tongue's hanging out too. You guys got anything in the bushes, Corporal?"

"Yeh," Pugh said. "We've got your captain down there in the river."

"That him out on the rock pile?" the balloon buck laughed. "Well, hell, keep him there. My gosh, if old Jonas ain't a jinx! Last time we flew this kite, in Milwaukee, from a park, the thing got caught on a high building. Didn't you guys ever hear of that? Well, old kid Jonas just saved his neck by clinging to the cornice when the sergeant tightened up and busted the cable trying to pull the bag loose. We'd a lost the balloon but the net fouled on a water spout and kept it from blowing away. Jonas wouldn't ride no more. And what I mean, that's tough, because that guy's a hog for flying pay. You remember he made us fly him all night that last day in Chicago?"

"Yeh." Pugh agreed. "Anyway, the captain'll get his air hours this month . . . Can you handle this balloon, private?"

"Me—hell, no. That's the sergeant's job."

"Well, can you inflate the bag?"

"Yeh, that's my job."

"You're just the guy we want. I'll handle the winch. I can do anything that a balloon outfit can do."

"What—what d'ya mean? What d'ya

want to fly this kite for? I'm cold and hungry, Corporal."

"The captain is too. And the captain will screw down on you hard if you don't get him off that rock."

"You mean lift him off with the bag?"

"One guess and you made it right," Pugh allowed. "Now fly a wide, flat turn with your truck and trailer while I show you where we'll set up. Climb aboard, gang; you're in the balloon corps now."

CROSSING the bridge to the east bank, Corporal Pugh chose a spot upwind from the stranded captain and as close thereto as possible. A location which, because of the timbered slope, was not any too near. It was all of fifty yards from the pier.

"How much inflating gas have you got?" Pugh asked the balloon buck while they were backing the winch into position.

"Not any too much, Corporal. Enough, but you'll want to weigh her light. Only a few sand bags, and no extra junk in the basket."

By then they had the basket on the ground.

"How about throwing out these parachutes?" the buck suggested.

"Sure," Pugh agreed. "Guess the captain won't want to do any 'chute jumping this P.M. eh? What's in this big can, private?"

"Them's iron rations—grub," the balloon man said.

"Out they come," Pugh ordered; and out they came. "Hell, they weigh a ton . . . Now, all we want on this basket is one hundred and fifty pounds of sand. When we fly the bag out to the captain, he can get in, throw away his sand, and we'll wind him back . . . Is she taking the gas, private? Filling O.K?"

"Give me a few more minutes and she's yours. But hell, Corporal, we balloon guys wouldn't inflate a bag in this wind. If the sergeant was here he'd climb my frame right."

"The sergeant's where our sergeant is, in St. Paul," Pugh reminded the cautious one. "Guy, if they'd keep all our sergeants and officers in town, and let us corporals and bucks run the Air Service, well, balloons would go some place, eh?"

"Damn' tootin', you tell 'em, Corporal. She's set. Take her away . . . But, my gosh, this is some wind."

"It was predicted," Pugh told him. "We've been hurrying all day. Your captain has been in the air for more than six hours now. And he only needed seven hours and twenty minutes to begin with. Gosh, if things keep going as smooth as this, we'll have him off in ten minutes, and he'll be cheated out of qualifying after all . . . All right, gang. Bear a hand on those guide lines and we'll fly the kite out to the captain. Never mind the winch; let her pay out free and I'll man her when we get set to wind in."

With one guide line upriver, and a second downstream, the mechanics, augmented by willing civilians, allowed the bulky, bouncing bag to go downwind toward the waiting Jonas. A sort of balloon race atmosphere had taken the crowd; and the captain, right in his element, was waving orders and getting set to do his stuff.

"I'm proud of myself," Corporal Pugh said when the basket reached the captain's anxious hands, and the holders snubbed their lines to arrest farther drift. "I've mastered ballooning in one lesson, and only an hour ago my closest friends thought I was running a sandy on them when I stood up and said—"

"Just a minute, Corporal," the balloon private cut in on Pugh. "If I was you, I'd get all these civies away from the hold-down lines. It's against Army orders to have them holding on. One of them might get a foot tangled and be hoisted off the ground."

"Thanks," Pugh said. "Anyway, the winch, like the Navy, brings the captain back."

Corporal Pugh said a few words to the willing helpers, explained the thing, and had them stand back, free of the ropes.

The captain had climbed into the

basket. Now, with the hands of long practise, he dropped his sand ballast; and the bag kited up from the pier. A cheer went up from the onlookers; and one might think that the captain was about to go some place.

"This wind," Pugh remarked, "is sure just about what the doctor ordered. Without the winch, we'd never get this here equipment back to earth. Look at that cable stretch. There's going to be one seasick captain in a minute. Let's see, seven hours are down right this minute . . . Are we all set for the grand descent? No two ways about it, gang, the captain will cry tears of appreciation and joy on my shoulder. Chances are, he'll go right to Major Opie and recommend me for a sergeancy, and I'll say no. If I can't be a master-sergeant, I won't be anything.

"Cast off those snubbed lines now," Pugh ordered, "and we'll let the bag pull out the slack on the cable drum."

The corporal, like the rest of men, liked to see anything high in the air. No doubt at all, when Pugh was a kid he had spent all his time flying kites—or killing cats. A fine bit of the adventurer was in his two-striped soul. By allowing the free pull to take up the slack on the drum, Pugh knew that a great many feet of altitude would be quickly added to the captain's present position. The winch truck's motor was purring, and Pugh stood with a hand on the winch brake as he yelled—

"Let her run!"

THE MEN cast off the two hold-down lines and the cable went running. There was a merry *whirr* as the steel line payed out and the balloon shot up. Captain Jonas shot a quick glance groundward and sank from view in the basket. It, no doubt, was a sickly feeling he was experiencing.

"Whoopee—she do run!" Corporal Pugh cheered.

The watchers saw him bear down on his brake lever. They heard the drum grind to a stop. Then they heard a shrill screech and screaming of cable, a running cable that continued to unwind from the winch's drum. And Pugh's eyes stood out from his head. He strong-armed his lever some more, and racked his brain for a quick answer. And, of a sickly sudden, the answer came—when the free end of the long cable snapped away from the winch. And the balloon, on the wild east wind, went away from there.

Corporal Pugh looked like a man who had made two or three guesses that were all wrong. He had been holding something, and now he wasn't. Success had lingered, loitered and stalled for seven hours and some minutes only to fly the coop when the big killing was within reach.

"I forgot to tell you," the balloon private said. "Yes, Corporal, I sure forgot to tell you. You see, when we had that trouble with the balloon getting hung up on that roof in Milwaukee, and we busted the cable, the sergeant said, 'T'hell with sitting down here in the cold and making a splice. We'll do it first thing when we get to Snelling where there's warm shops to work in.' Well, Corporal, we never got here to Snelling, and the splice was never made. And now look at the captain."

"You look at him," Pugh advised. "Can you see him?"

"Hell, no, the captain's gone," the private mused. "And you threw out the parachutes and the grub, and the valving-off cord was broken off short. I intended to fix it but I didn't."

"Ye gods!" Pugh wailed. "Are you sure that you didn't misplace a charge of T. N. T. with a set time fuse, in that bag?"

About then—sunset was close at hand, that is if there was a sun to set—Majors Opie and King drove up to where the group was looking into the distant sky. It is not betraying any trust, nor splashing any official mud, to say that the majors forced back smiles when the boys explained the captain's new dilemma.

"An unavoidable accident, Major," King explained to Opie. "Corporal Pugh had no way of knowing about the cable."

"Obviously," Opie agreed. "Acci-

dents and the captain seem to have much in common. Anyway, it is Jonas' balloon, and his crew, and his worry; and we have other business at hand, King.

"Here, you men, take that equipment to the fort's garage and report to quarters, right away."

"You too, boys," Major King said to his mechanics. "And make it fast. The A. A. P. entrains at St. Paul right after supper for the East. Get your grub, and hold yourselves ready."

Five minutes later the Mississippi was alone.

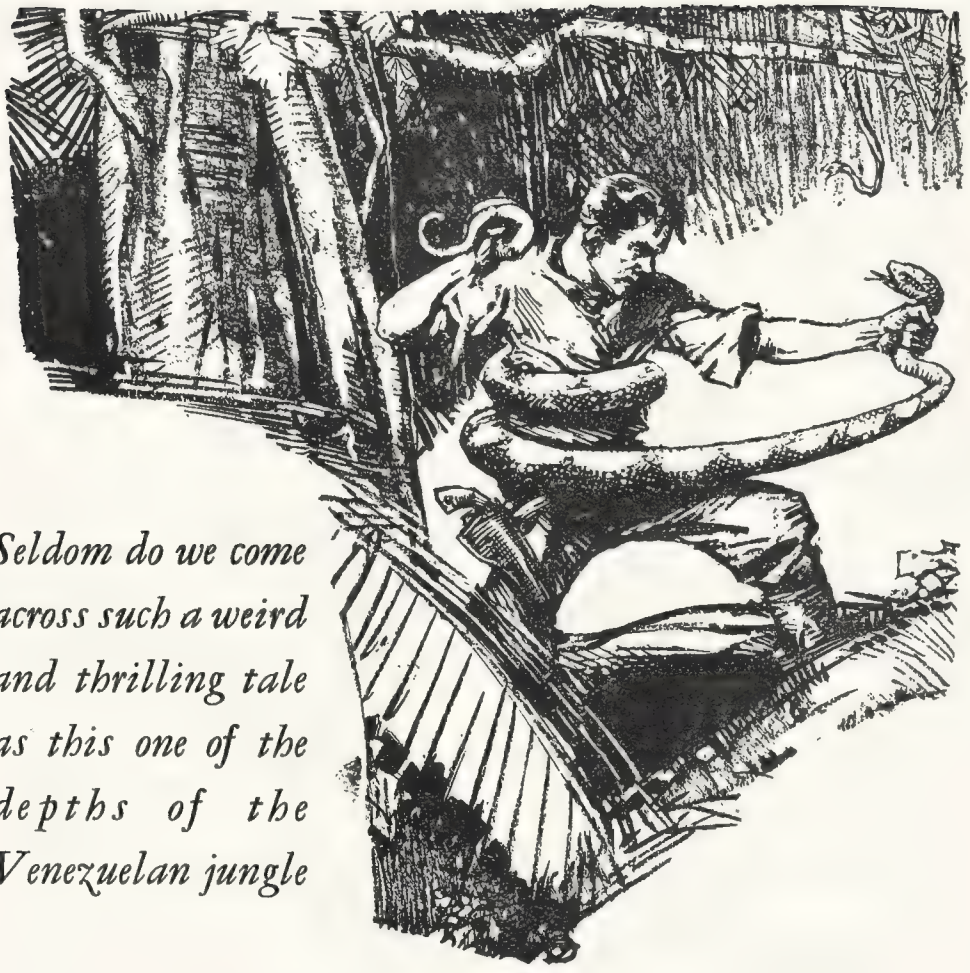
Where Captain Jonas went to will never be fully known. That he went for a whole night is history. And that he spent the whole of the following day coming back—still in the air—is peculiar. But he did. A free balloon is a humorous thing and when uncertain wintery winds carry it the craft has no more direction than an Army order.

In all, Captain Jonas had been in the air for thirty-two hours by the time his dragging cable tangled in a line of telephone wires on a road leading into Chicago. This length of time, thirty-two hours, was a new record for the captain's type of balloon. The captain asked for official recognition on the new long-time flight. And—as sure as the Lord made little green apples, and lighter-than-air captains—he got it. That is air history. Also, it is tough on the troops.

"And," Corporal Pugh said to Major King and Master-sergeant Nichols, when they were back in New York, "I'm not even mentioned in the dispatches."

"Why should you be?" the major laughed. "Did you even supply helmet and goggles for the flight?"

"No, Pugh," Nichols barked. "All you supplied was a long list of assorted accidents. You're sure the goods."



Seldom do we come across such a weird and thrilling tale as this one of the depths of the Venezuelan jungle

ONE MILE THICK

By CHESTER L. SAXBY

FLAMING sunset beyond the high hills lighted a world of green wilderness and a pool of clear water, in which was reflected the flashing brilliance of gorgeous birds and moths and flowers. Only one unsightly thing marred the picture: the face of the man who hung over the log and drank. It was the face of a demon with a low slanting forehead and small snake eyes constantly shifting, set close above a flat nose. The wide mouth drooped cruelly, showing straggling teeth and bluish gums. Hard drink had blotched and mottled the man's skin, and fights had scarred it. The thick neck sent out muscles like whipcord toward the thick, sloping shoulders that had the merciless strength of a giant. He was built

for destroying, and all his career was given to it. But the country was roused behind him now.

Men with guns were creeping forward in a great half circle to cut off his retreat by way of the sea. They formed a human net, grimly set on vengeance. Dead or alive they meant to take the killer now, back him up against the jungle and make sure of him. His was the foulest of acts: he had assaulted a woman to top his other crimes. The hot blood of the forest frontier demanded payment. Bletcher's time had come.

Bletcher lifted his ugly face and laughed. He could hear them threshing and shouting a quarter of a mile away. He was in no hurry. Let them come closer before he bothered. If enough of them were on hand to close up the line so that he could not slip through, he had only to cut through this thin bit of jungle that he had chosen craftily, and then the open hills would carry him in a roundabout direction to the pastures and plantations of Venezuela and out by ports that did not know him. He lay back and waited. The sun set; the darkness came on rapidly. Likewise the orderly line of avengers came on. He got up. His trail was westerly then.

He had counted on that. Preparedness was a virtue with him. He had a pistol and plenty of ammunition. Better than that, two razor-sharp machetes were stuck in his belt, and a length of hemp rope and a short spade lay beside him. One short mile of trail blazing! A fool might have chosen the wrong spot or lost his head and rushed into these woods without thinking. But not Bletcher. This jungle in some places was five miles through, in some places ten. Here was its thinnest point. A tough job even here, as Bletcher well knew. But a mile was only a mile. He spat in the direction of the village, turned his back and plunged away from the little watch fires springing up everywhere. A mile to freedom!

He made short work of the intervening bush country, unafraid of the darkness. And he gave a cold shoulder to the inviting river with its man eating crocodiles and ferocious fish. The firm ground under him every time!

Suddenly, without the least bit of warning, the jungle rose before him. No gradual deepening of the shade; no slow thickening of trees. He had arrived all at once before a high curtain, black as velvet and as callous as himself. Raw edged it stood up and dared him. He grinned back, aware of its lack of depth. Yet it was awesome. Vertical streaks of ghostly white looked like cracks in it. They were not cracks but tall, bleached tree trunks blasted by the sun on this outer edge where the sun had its last chance to burn. Skeletons the color of chalk waited for a wind to topple them. And already a hundred stringy saplings were fighting for the place, fighting silently as they climbed in the misty heat.

Bletcher struck a match and held it to a small pocket compass. With great care he got his directions well in mind, then tramped on the match and started. At a single stride he passed out of silver starlight into air as black as ink. Up above him the starlight remained a hundred feet away. Instead of a curtain, the jungle was a room walled in and cluttered from end to end. No breath of air moved, not a leaf or blade of grass. But now the humid, pressing heat was gone. Perspiration ceased, vanished, and weariness went with it. Breathing was easy in this sea of ink.

But the going was hard. If a ten foot shoot brushed aside lightly, great air roots sixty feet high made a coarse lattice to bring up against, swaying and striking back with sufficient force to knock a man down. Where an enormous tree had toppled, tearing to shreds the lesser growths in its spectacular descent, a pencil of light revealed the gloom, and Bletcher stood in a narrow hallway eighty feet long. From the etched walls on either side the light flung off, unable to make an impression, and out of them arose a baying—the voice of the giant tree frog somewhere high in the branches. Now it rose again, like the coughing roar of a

lion. Bletcher pushed his way along the fallen trunk and at the upper end struggled amid a maze of branches to the tip. With a snort a red deer crashed past, and he sprang to follow its trail but halted immediately. Necessity demanded a straighter course for Killer Bletcher. He jumped down on to a fiddling cricket which stopped its ear piercing shriek. A startled paca scrambled off from a feast of nuts. A crab-jackal vanished in fear, throwing out its bitter taint that mingled with sickish sweet odors of blossoms. In the stillness a good sized arm of the tree began to move. It was an immense snake. The head lifted. The constrictor glared venomously at the man; the equally evil eyes of the man glared wickedly at the snake. Neither attacked. Each understood the other.

But trust was another thing. Bletcher cut a perch in the springy arms of the tree and pulled himself into it. The rest of the night he dozed, reasonably safe so long as he remained still. He was grinning when he fell asleep.

The morning light, pale and eery, proved him wise. Here before him grew a perfect tangle three times his own height, so dense that he could not thrust his hand anywhere into it. He tried left and right for an opening, then came back and seized the interwoven stems which looked like grass. He pulled it. The stuff ran like a saw through his flesh, ripping it open. The teeth of the jungle had begun to gnash. Paying no attention to the wound beyond a glowering glance, he jerked out a machete and hewed at the towering obstacle. It fell easily and made Bletcher grin again as he cautiously brushed it aside. The joy was short lived. Out of the hollow stems rushed hundreds of small stinging ants whose homes had been destroyed. The man cursed and hewed the faster. Had he been less an animal, the irritation of the minute insects would have driven him back, crazed, but he kept on woodenly and made good progress. At last he was through and in a bit of glade. A glory of matchless bloom greeted him. Over bushes and stumps lay streamers of ruby red passion flowers. Pure white convolvulus lifted to patches of light. Great orchids and yellow allamandas were everywhere. Bletcher spat on them, crushed them under his heels vindictively and charged on. The touches of sunlight fell away, and in stench filled depths he slipped on fungus amid pale and rotten undergrowth. Instantly he floundered in bog. Time and again the bottom was gone under him, and pitching into the crown of a fern, house high, he dragged himself out with nothing to spare. Rotted logs he went through as if they were butter, and although ten feet away was broad daylight, phosphorus painted his hands until they glowed like something unearthly.

His flayed palm was hurting, but he continued in good humor for he had made uncommon progress thus far. Possibly it was the mental picture of that stern faced band of man hunters squatting at the wall of the jungle that caused him to burst into hoarse laughter at intervals. They had considered him as good as taken, and when he passed through the mighty curtain of trees they must have felt quite as satisfied as if they had him in their clutches. But he knew better. In record time a quarter of a mile was behind him. Why fear? What was here to kill a man?

In fine spirit he faced a new difficulty as he crawled out of the bog. Bamboo reeds, not at all where one would expect them, had got a footing here where fast growing *cecropia* trees should have dominated the sandy ground. They had stooled out until they appeared like the close packed pipes of a vast organ, and the tubes were as hard as metal. Bletcher hacked for two hours, nicking one machete and then the other, dulling them both but making some advance—at the expense of his legs and arms which were stabbed by the brittle stubs he left, jabbed and bruised and torn. He won through in the end, and after that through a misery of thorny nightshades; but in the next open space he had to stop and rest and bind up his cuts with strips of his shirt. He was bleeding in a dozen places. And

there ahead of him stood the razor-grass again, twining over tree arms, as soft to the eyes as silk and loosely swaying as if a gesture would swing it aside. But a gesture of that kind was a gesture almost of death, and to strike it angrily was to lay open the flesh to the bone.

THE MAN scowled at it, sat down gingerly, got out his file and honed the machete blades, performing the work clumsily with his hands done up in bandages. Then in a rush he flung at the draped razor-grass and slashed with all his might. Unseen thorns gouged into the leather of his shoes. Insects dropped down his neck. New cuts in his hands bled freely so that he could scarcely keep his fingers tight enough about the hasp of his weapon to slash where he aimed. But he possessed the vitality of a beast. When the grass bent and flew back across his face, he merely wiped the dripping blood out of his eyes with his sleeve and slashed the harder. He did not look nice, and some of the wounds were bound to heal unevenly so that he would never look nice at any time, but he had never looked nice, and was proud of it. Lone women meeting him on an unfrequented path at the edge of the Guiana village might feel ashamed of their dumbing fear, but men knew that same fear, also. This satanic ugliness was Bletcher's best stock in trade. A few more scars would add power.

It was ordained that he should beat the razor-grass, as he had beaten all else that opposed him. The jungle's proud defense gave grudgingly and exacted terrible retribution, but ultimately it yielded and Bletcher grinned when he sprang out on the far side. He intended that it should bow in every other respect. He was the master of hate and fighting. He was on his way to Venezuela to take toll of life there. His wounds were like notches on some men's guns.

The twists in the contour of the land slowed him up a great deal. A gully blocked him, drove him off his bearings and into a mammoth buttressed tree which, with its aerial roots, covered as much ground as a big barn. And then he was lost. Every ten feet he consulted the compass. Battling out of a huge patch of elephant-ears, he was wrong again. Dragging by his broken fingernails up a steep hill of loose sand where bits of weed were the only holds, he went wide once more. Angry at this loss of time, wishing to be into the hills before night, he held the compass in his hand all through a swamp of cat-tails—and dropped it just one stride short of solid turf, dropped it into the filth that measured to his waist. For half a hour he fished for it with his head under water as often as not. He did not find it. Luckily for him the sun shone through more often, and the general upward slope told him fairly well the way he wanted to go. But it was a bad loss at best, and he knew it and raved when he finally turned away, exhausted by the stooping and the stench and the need of holding his breath. Besides, it was hot.

He cursed like a madman while he stood there. He smelled to high heaven, which troubled him very little. When he dried off he would lose the smell. But to dry off he must stop moving altogether. The least exertion made him sweat. It was late afternoon, but the wind had died; all nature held its breath, waiting for the storm that was sure to come. He stamped up the bank, trod blindly on a fallen branch—and yelled as it quivered under him. Instinct told him at once what to do, but he seemed unable to do it. He should have run. Instead, he stood stock still and blinked. He could blame the half hour in the swamp for his stupidness. Gases bubbling up out of the mud robbed him of clear thought. The end of the branch swished around and made for him. It was a snake, the snake of snakes—the dreaded bushmaster.

In a trice it attacked. Bletcher glared, as he had glared at the constrictor and as he had glared at all the world. The bushmaster, alarmed by the heavy stamp of that foot and the high pitched yell, hurtled at him, fangs out. And the man, for once thoroughly frightened, jumped

high in the air. The fangs struck against his foot and down came Bletcher across the snake's body. His heel slid, rasping, off the rough scales and dropped him. Desperately his hands reached out as he fell and grasped the tough neck a bare inch back of the head. An inch of play for the gigantic head with its dismaying green eyes and repulsive gaping mouth white as snow inside, and the flicking tongue forking out. One short inch and no more; yet in the next few awful minutes that gaping death turned three-quarters of the way backward on its sliding joint to look slantwise into Bletcher's red face. Like lightning the horrible tongue vibrated so close—so very close—that it fanned the skin of the man's knuckles.

A sharp whirring at the tip of the tail sounded the battle song from which every animal in the jungle retires, every living thing without exception—especially the native Indian who fears little else. In the mounting stillness that sound emptied the surrounding woods of all creatures that could move. No eyes would witness this fight between the two lords of creation.

And from first to last the odds of victory were with the bushmaster. It had no arms, no legs, no weapons other than its short fangs which failed by a hair to reach their objective, and its eight foot length. On the other hand, Bletcher wore a revolver that could belch destruction in a flash. In addition he had two long knives. The revolver and the knives were so near to his grasp that his arm brushed them. Nevertheless, in the ensuing struggle they might as well have been a hundred miles removed. Bletcher had a name for swiftness. The jerking back of his hand was like the jumping of a spark, a sinister spark from which men had died. Here and now that speed of long practise amounted to less than nothing. He knew it and did not try. One hand could not hold the snake's head for a split second. Both were hardly strong enough—hands that could squeeze a new potato to pulp.

For the bushmaster had settled down to lash the life out of this fool thing that clung because it could not let go. Eight feet of scaly body whirled to snap at the human barnacle. Eight feet of ragged hemp would have hurt less. That stroke tore the trousers from the man, wiping them off his thigh and with them a layer of skin. Bletcher roared. His wrists were steel cords, his neck swollen into ridges as he pressed down and got his legs across the quivering body to lock his knees and heels around it before it ripped him open.

THEN began a wrestling match that no stage ever held. The convulsions of the snake were somewhat hampered but by no means stopped. An undulating twist sent the man over on to his back with the huge weight sagging on him and the weaving head above him, flicking down. There the fight seemed about to end, with Bletcher's overtaxed arms unable to stand the strain of thrusting half the enormous serpent skyward. His elbows drooped while his terrific spirit summoned them to stiffness. His lacerated features contorted as he tried and tried to master the overpowering weariness. In spite of him his arms wilted, shaking as they drooped. With mad strength he was digging his brute fingers in to choke—choke—choke! For once a set of neck muscles resisted the killer. For once a supple spine refused to snap. And a wavy, lengthwise motion rippled the massive body, drawing it inch by inch down, down past his face and toward his chest. The man's forearms rested now on his elbows. Eyes met in a horrible moment, glassy and unyielding, measuring fathomless hate no matter what came. The snake seemed almost to know and gloat over its certain victory, hovering and prolonging the agony before it struck.

Bletcher experienced his greatest power then. The baleful eyes, instead of hypnotizing him, drew from the depths of his being a peculiar madness and a remarkable frenzy. A spasm jarred him. It

pitched him, snake and all, on to his shoulder where he wavered on the point of falling back and just drifted over on to his face. And his face came down on to his arms as if this effort were too much, a death flurry. He rolled completely off, his hands still locked, so locked by the incessant exertion that they would not loosen.

Immediately the bushmaster vented its spleen. Cheated of a quick triumph, it curled and whipped and lashed. Leaves and grass and stones swirled. Bletcher was a terrier grimly hanging to a bull's nose. He was thrown from side to side and torn by every flail of the live and lithe cable. He hung on because his set muscles were powerless to open, and he thrust his wide mouth between his arms and sank his teeth into the slimy flesh where the neck scales grew smallest. It appeared but the instinctive attempt to bury his head from the murder blows, and perhaps mere instinct set him to chewing. His legs were useless; he had nothing left but his teeth. He used them. He gnawed at the tough skin and broke it and bit deep—a mouthful of thick, pulsing flesh. His teeth came together. Something snapped, and the snake's head lost some of its motion; but the tail grew more violent.

With great force he was flung against a small tree. In his condition it could not have hurt him much. He was past hurting just then, past everything but taking this destroyer with him in his death. His jaws worked insanely, severing muscle after muscle. A vertebra raked his gums, and he worried it while his nose snuffed up blood when he breathed. He bit; he champed his jaws. Yet teeth would not break through. It was the lashing body that broke its own weakened neck. The fight ended in suicide. The bushmaster lay quiet but for the throbbing of its tail. Bletcher's grip for a time would not loosen, so excited were his nerves. The hands came away at last, falling soddenly—too near. The bushmaster was dying but not dead. A barbed fang flicked out and sank into a finger.

The man raised himself dizzily, groped for the machete in his belt, drew it stoically, and whacked the finger off at the second joint.

He fell back then into a silence so finely drawn that the beating tail of the snake sounded as loud as a tom-tom. It was the moment of stupendous waiting. With a roar the wind burst overhead, and the heavens were split by appalling bolts of lightning. Thunder shook the ground. Giant trees bent half over. Branches a foot thick whipped off and cut like a scythe through intervening growth. The rain poured down in a sheet. One minute Bletcher was smeared with blood; in the next he was washed clean in all his naked body. He was not conscious of the rain. The swamp rose, lapped at his feet, crawled up his legs, embraced his waist. Still as a stone he lay. Around him drifted twigs and a mound of leaves that almost covered him. The storm raged briefly and passed on. Pin points of sunlight filtered down briefly, then faded. Shadow and darkness followed.

A tree-frog howled high up under the rushing cloud rack. Twin beads of light gleamed, and the owl faced goatsucker wailed on a drooping note that sank low and deep. Rosy sparks flew in growing numbers as illuminated beetles ventured forth. They flared like falling stars. A *kinkajou* with flaming eyes swung on its hairy legs and arms and squawked at what it saw and what it smelled, and rapidly swung away. Something large drew cautiously toward the swamp to drink. It came on padded feet and skulked softly to the source of the blood scent. The sight of the bushmaster sent it leaping upward and back to tumble in a heap. In a twinkling it was up and bounding off—a jaguar by its growl. Afterward the black night slept.

In the early morning Bletcher opened his eyes. They were bloodshot patches in the raw flesh crossed and recrossed by red and purple welts. He moved his arms stiffly and winced when he hit the stub of his severed finger which surprisingly had not bled much. The blood,

forced out of his hands in the vicious grapple, had flowed back weakly in the chill night and clotted. All his wounds had caked instead of draining for hours. By that token Bletcher was alive. The jungle had hurled its most powerful warrior at him when he chopped through its razor-grass. The warrior had failed. A clear, warm day was breaking, and two-thirds of the tangled fastness that measured one mile stood between the retreating Bletcher and his pursuers. The hills of Venezuela were not far off.

Conditions might have been improved, it is true. He felt sore and stiff, to judge by his grimaces when he moved doubtfully. But he moved, no matter how tenderly. No bones were broken. What if one side was one vast scab? This was not Africa with its blackwater fever. It was his left hand that had suffered. He held it up and grinned at it malevolently, cursing it. But he did not curse the snake. He was too proud of himself for that. His beady little eyes glowed, and he laughed out loud. The laugh broke several scabs around his mouth, so he brought the laughter down to a chuckle. Bletcher was an optimist with a thick streak of conceit.

While he lay there taking stock, the swamp began to show signs of activity. Throaty cries came from high up in slender, bony trees whose roots were in the water. A good sized bird fluttered down among the lily pads. Up on the limb perched four more. They appeared to be marsh hens, and marsh hens were food.

Bletcher's matches were wet, but not his gun. Pain stabbed across his face when he stood up. He sat down again. The hens would have to wait. He snarled his impatience. Plainly he was hungry. Crawling farther up the slope, he reached a sandy, sunlit spot on which he spread his wet matches to dry. He rested here, making shift to bind his tattered clothing with tough grass, thus protecting his sores against flies.

The wilderness rose high. On one side stood a veritable palisade of bamboos, stopping the march of coconut palms leaning like masts in a sea wind. On the other side grew high and mighty silk-cotton trees which had dropped their leaves and let the sun shine down. Bletcher's head rested against a *cashew* tree gay with blossom and sweet with fruit. Tanagers and grosbeaks whirred about in it, pecking the yellow *cashews* and driving off bigger raiders. Later the branches swayed and whipped with a greater burden. A monkey face peered out, full of curiosity for what lay below. Bletcher bleared up at it—a fuzzy, human looking *kinkajou.*

OUT CAME the revolver. A shattering roar! The astonished monkey slipped, clutched at branch after branch, and fell to the ground. It made an unhappy sound and clasped its wounded side. Its worried eyes stared at the man while it felt about for its seat of pain. Dismally it chattered over the increasing weakness that would not permit it to stand on its feet. The chattering became a whimpering cry like a baby's. It rolled on the grass, one spread hand covering its face, the other its stomach. Bletcher drew himself to it, once more grinning, and gripped its throat. The small hands clasped his wrist anxiously. A pleading wonder—a choking cough. Bletcher had his food.

To build a fire he had to creep into denser shade where the downpour had not penetrated and sticks were dry. Being faint by this time, he did not try to creep back but whacked out a space large enough for his need and there cooked his meal. In the midst of his ravenous repast his quick ears warned him that he had done an unwise thing in shooting off his gun. Feet were running through the woods, and not the feet of animals but of men. He detected the difference in those thudding, wide spaced strides. His bloodshot eyes told his amazement. Here in the heart of the jungle to meet his own kind! Not Guiana men surely, for none of them would set foot behind the black forest curtain. Not men from the other

side, not yet. The answer was contained in a word. *Indians!* The scourge of the frontier; the terror of outlying farms! *Head hunters!*

Swiftly he beat out the fire, smoldering and sending up its telltale smoke. He peeped out of his nest. A dozen naked fellows, stringy legged, daubed with pigment, armed with spears of the long, tough reed growth, milled in the semi-cleared place he had quitted. All were lusty, ample podded warriors, and all were facing Bletcher's thicket. An arm drew back. A spear clove the deep tangle, passing at great speed overhead—a comet with a poisoned tip. A second spear drove nearer. It was followed by a shower of half a dozen. They had smelled him, of course. Bletcher's face puffed up in anger. He raised the revolver. It was his nature to kill first and retreat afterward. At the first report an Indian pitched face downward. The others dropped with him and wriggled toward the surrounding shelter, but not before another lay still. Bletcher, his teeth bared, slowly withdrew and lurched deeper into the dark maw of wilderness.

It was well that he had put a scare into his assailants and halted them for a brief period of puzzlement, for his blundering feet were easy to pursue, even though these aborigines had never developed the tracking instinct to an art. He drove his wobbly legs a considerable distance and sank in a faint. When consciousness returned, he staggered on farther. Deeper and deeper grew the shade. Undergrowth parted and, closing behind him, left not a trace that anything had broken through. Instead of towering trees, a new and very green jumble of spiked shrubs thrust up, their jointed and hollow stems locked in strangle holds. Unseen under foot, the dead and fallen timber, laid low by some strange disease, tripped him continually. Reeling drunkenly, he toppled prone.

The disturbed new growth swayed back and covered him so close that not even insects won down to sting the corpse-like intruder. Past him as he lay inert, his pulse at its lowest, crept the light footed Indians. Their passing made a hissing as they rubbed the brush from shoulder to heel, a hissing very like the swish of surf sucked back into the sea. They were upon him. The toe of a black buck struck on the sole of Bletcher's sprawled foot and threw him so that he dove on to his outstretched hands, bending the grasses over that still form they sought. The buck picked himself up with scarcely a break in his stride and padded on, charging the accident to one more snag and thinking no more about it, doubtless.

In that fashion another wave of retribution surged over Bletcher and left him unscathed. Yet one thing of grim consequence it had done: it had driven him from his course more conclusively than his own wanderings would ever have accomplished. He woke in a twilight yellow green from the sun shining not six feet over his matted hair, and realized that he was lost.

Freshened by the long sleep, he started up and waded ahead at a good pace. He might as well have been blindfolded, and this thick set mass of stems a maze of cane. To one in an airplane directly above him, his course would have been apparent in a ripple of leaves; only that. And the course went in confusing sweeps, now left, now right, now in a full circle. At times he parted the bush and stamped it down so that a little hole showed him the sky and the sun riding in it. But as soon as he reckoned his proper direction and headed into it, again he lost all idea of where he was going in the ceaseless brushing of fronds in his eyes.

One single mile to penetrate, and of the mile not a third left! Perhaps in the killer's mind the joke of it grew more and more vivid. At any rate he laughed like one who has thrust his head into a foolish undertaking and understands that the joke is on him. But it was the vacant laugh of an idiot. A third of a mile—and the end refused to arrive! He was two days in the tall bush which was no jungle at all. It was funny. He stepped out of it like a swimmer breaking water. His

mouth was open. His arms still worked, pushing out in a sort of breast stroke. He walked straight into a massive tree and was knocked out, still grinning, breathing defiance. Stirring to life, his hand went to his eyes. But he was not blind. He was in the thick texture of another dark curtain. His laugh was very strong then. It was not difficult to comprehend that he had cut through one crust of the jungle pie into the filling, and through that to the other crust. Beyond this second crust was Venezuela and freedom. The crust would be no thicker than the first, as indeed it was not. Bletcher was about to confute the reasoning of the men of Guiana and walk out of his last hideous crime with no greater punishment than the wilderness had been able to offer.

It was for the most part a new jungle that made the western wall. For all its stygian blackness, it had few monarchs of the forest. Slight difference above but an enormous difference below. A difference in footing. Mushroom growth did that. It was too early in this new jungle for the denied weaklings to have died and rotted away, laying a walkable floor. In bent and crippled discard the unfit vegetation drooped and settled. Vines had lost their hold and sunk. They were woven nets that bound the ankles and, quite as often, the arms. They were half erect, and they were wound around more stable things on both sides. Creepers snarled the toes by making loops several inches off the ground. And beyond such a tangle was ooze into which leaves had not yet settled to suck up the pasty moisture. To trip was to dive headlong into the muck.

Bletcher plowed through a midnight house of thousands of rooms giving off at any angle by doorways of very hard wood and into doors half open to hit him squarely. They were rooms filled with all manner of furniture, and he sprawled over it to flop lengthwise into a reeking, deep piled carpet of mud. And the pile of the carpet—the mud, a-squirm with blind life—adhered to him when he got up out of it. It dried quickly, and more mud dried on that. He became a plastered image so heavy that he swung stiffly from side to side. He fell without being tripped. Then in a thick, tough net of lianas he struggled for liberty, and the cakes of mud fell off. And under the mud his wounds had festered.

It was the pervading damp that did it. Damp and darkness, the worst enemies of man. Like the blood sucking vermin spawning in these pools and gluing their disc mouths to his skin, the damp sapped his vitality. His nerves were well sheathed against physical blows, but after a period in this miasma they threatened to give way. The *drip—drip—drip—drip* from overhead was wearing dangerously. Just water splashing on his head; yet hours of it made the brain recoil as if live coals fell and burned in. Bletcher tried to dodge the big splattering drops, and then he tried to run from them, smashing into everything. Half mad with his imprisonment, he dashed like a trapped animal at the unseen bars of his cage. His madness doubled his strength. He battered through thick and thin and pitched out of the black fog into a world of growing light. Running now as if the devil were after him, he plunged into a deer trail rising steadily. The forest on either side thinned as the soil became sandy. The sweat poured from him, the sweat of sudden and overwhelming relief.

HE HAD broken through the jungle and out into daylight. He had beaten men and beasts and engulfing wilderness, and his success addled his brains still more. Wildly he raced from the clutching arms that might yet reach out and drag him back. The path headed into the westering sun without a fork in it—a trail cut to his order. Twig and stone he kicked aside, rushing pell-mell, as long as his breath lasted.

He did not see the hole in the trail, a hole five feet deep extending across the deer-run where the trees bordered it most thickly and filled it with shadow. His

foot went out and met nothing. He tumbled to the bottom, quite as its Indian makers had meant wild life to do, although it was a poor trap now since the storm had filled it with several feet of loose sandy loam. However, it crumpled Bletcher in a heap with one leg twisted under him. His hoarse rage echoed terribly. His ankle was twisted and broken. His running had been stopped neatly.

He lay among frogs and centipedes and beetles and spiders and grasshoppers. That was the type of life that the hole was able to trap now. Frogs and beetles and a man! Good company! And cockroaches rattling over the rest. Disagreeable but harmless. The other victims drew away quickly from Bletcher—those he had not squashed in his fall. He lay there, clearing his mind. In half an hour he scrambled up on one foot and glared back at the towering black curtain of the jungle. So he saw on the narrow path of his late travel a sight difficult to credit.

The trail was all but blotted out by a moving blanket billowing toward him, giving an impression of the trail rolling up and coming at him. That moving blanket was unquestionably the dark hand of the defeated jungle reaching to drag him back—a billowing hand like a cloud—for it was made up of those tiny creatures which are the one common dread of the tropic backwoods, the one fear of beasts great and small, the only ghost that the conquering bushmaster quails from: the swarming army ant. To the eye they seemed a mere nuisance; in reality they were cold blooded murder personified and inescapable. Nothing that they passed over ever lived.

Bletcher, along with other Guiana villagers, was no stranger to this peril. When the army ants came in their uncounted droves, a village moved out and waited until the scourge had passed on. There need be no great hurry to one walking at an average stride. But Bletcher's swelling ankle was causing him acute pain.

He turned and clawed up the farther rim of the hole by his hands, and there sank down, panting. The pit was the cause of his present trouble, but it was likely also to be his best defense against this new menace.

The crawling blanket swarmed at its best speed toward the hole and, without slackening its pace, tumbled into it. It was a cascade. The bottom of the hole became a churning welter. The frogs and beetles were covered in an instant and ceased to exist. Tens of thousands of ants were heaped in this caldron. Then oddly the cascading stopped. Fully half the advancing army halted abruptly and divided, fanning out around the hole and vanishing into the forest.

Bletcher did not see them go. His piercing little blood shot eyes were gazing into the pit. In the disorder something was happening. Lines of ants were forming up the gravelly slope, six lines, three and four ants wide in marching order. The slope was sharp, almost vertical. The lines did not try to march up the wall, but each rank settled ahead of those that had gone before, and those behind walked over them to settle down in their turn, forming a broad ladder that stopped the crumbling of the sand and offered a living causeway for the rest to come rushing. Those with white heads and stouter bodies did most of the ladder building. With their great hooked jaws they dug into the sand or fastened around a pebble, waving them in front of their bulging heads. They were tusks and jaws and feelers all in one. They were a substitute for eyes. This astounding army of workers and soldiers was totally blind.

Yet they never once lost the sense of direction, even when milling in a jumble at the bottom of the hole. And the slightest touch of a comrade's jaws telegraphed an order instantly communicated to the thousands. A keen scent had led them here, the scent of blood, and they followed it through any obstacle.

They inspected the steep wall carefully, sending out scouts and diggers to locate and improve the best routes. Then the lines of ladders were built in the most

favorable places. Over the ladders rushed the smaller black headed mob to gain the top. When they were all but straddling the rim, Bletcher jerked out a machete and wiped them off. They fell back, and avalanches of sand fell on them. But at least a score stuck to the machete blade and ran up it to sting Bletcher's hand. He dropped the weapon into the hole as he slapped them off. They covered it at once and tried to reform the lines. He gouged the side of the pit with his foot, spilling quarts of sand on them, burying hundreds. Struggling against this cannonading, they gave over that wall and attempted wide detours. Then when he stretched flat to bury them on the outer sides, crowds of workers rushed back into the original breach and dug out fresh roads, a grain at a time, passing back the grains from jaw to jaw. And roaming individuals would be set right by policemen between the scrambling tides.

Bletcher began working as feverishly as the ants. He had destroyed many, but he had also broken the steep walls, and these determined insects came faster now. In firmer footing they faced the top, those ladders. In softer stuff they faced downward and were not suffocated by tumbling débris. When the ladders broke loose, the fact was known, and a second mass charged to fill the gap. Bletcher batted with both hands and was bitten often. More and more ferocious the ants became, and soon they were leaping desperately at the slapping hand, leaping like tarantulas.

Unseen, silently, the rear ranks that had been warned and had defiled around the hole into the woods, appeared in the path ahead. Back they swung to join forces with their brethren. Their legions poured around the sprawled Bletcher and swarmed over his body. With a yell he rolled over and over and clawed at his frayed clothes. Tree trunks flung him back and forth. He pitched on to hands and knees and commenced to scuffle up the path. The little killers settled on every inch of him, between his legs, under his arms, in his ears and up his nose, under his hair. He could not both run and scratch, nor for that matter could he run at all. And the scratching was a grim necessity, his madness real now. In his pain and terror he tore off every shred of clothing and floundered to his knees, thence on to one foot. He dove for the trees. He came down on the other foot, with its broken ankle. Half in and half out of the path he fell on his face, the sharp agony stunning his consciousness. He was black with ants.

Other thousands of that rear half of the army from first to last paid him no attention but hurried past to the brink of the pit and, clinging to one another, heaved a hanging ladder of themselves downward. With the growing length making greater and greater weight, the support above grew wider and thicker. The lowest member just reached the first of the soldiers below. A shock went through the entire force. From three directions it turned and mounted the offered way.

And every blind ant, clambering over the rim, raced straight for the legs of Bletcher stretched partway into the trail. So cloaked was the two legged killer by this six legged horde that only the contour of his figure suggested his presence. Bletcher regained his senses for a very short moment, but on his first breath he choked to death.

A ranchman of the uplands, straying into this bit of woods on the edge of his pasture land, discovered a clean, white skeleton, the skull slightly tipped up by a mound of earth. The empty eyesockets seemed to stare back at the distant curtain of the dark jungle inquiringly.

FOG

A Story of the Chilean Pampas

By KELSEY P. KITCHEL

JACK GORDON was proud of his Spanish. And he had reason to be, for it was far better than that of the average American salesman who, armed with a brief-case, visits the nitrate *oficinas* up there in the Chilean pampa. It was not Chilean Spanish, he discovered quickly; nevertheless he could make himself understood and, what was more important, he could understand.

He liked the Chilenos. He wanted to understand them. The merchants and officials with whom he came in contact could, of course, speak English; but Gordon recognized the subtle, potent flattery which an Anglo-Saxon offers a Latin-American in the fluent use of Spanish. He was young and enthusiastic; he had not lived long enough to become hard-boiled, to lose enjoyment in meeting strangers.

He liked the pampa, too, although it was not what he had expected. Books had led him to believe that "pampa" signified vast prairies covered with tall exotic plumy vegetation known by the name of "pampas grass" back home in the United States. The nitrate pampa was guiltless of grass of any sort. There was not so much as a cactus or a bush to

gladden the eye—only an endless rolling waste of varicolored sand edged with thin blue mountain silhouettes. There were shallow basins white with salt; there were tumbled fields of nitrate where the blasted brown rock hemmed in the minute man-made oases of the *oficinas.*

Oficina.

There was a word that the college course in Spanish had neglected. In Chile, Gordon found, the word was synonymous with "nitrate-plant—the place where the nitrate comes from", as he wrote home to his mother. He also wrote that hospitality was a moribund art, back home, compared with that of the pampa.

"I have to ride all over the desert," he explained in his letters, "on horseback because trains and motor cars are so scarce. When I reach an *oficina* I'm always welcomed like an old friend, even though the manager has never heard of me and knows that I've come to sell him something . . . Most of the plants are run by Englishmen, but there are a few American and Chilean managers, and they are all alike for hospitality. It is a continual house party for me. When I've finished at one place the manager directs me to the next, and, if I need them, lends me a horse and guide—*propio* we say down here."

In his own words, he had "about cleaned up the pampa" when the wintry month of June crept over the desert. One more manager to interview, and then he would take the night train to Antofagasta where he would catch the steamer home. This last *oficina* was the most remote, most inaccessible, the nearest to the bleak Andes.

Eager as he was not to miss the next steamer he felt that it was a matter of pride now to meet that last prospect on his list. He wished to end his already successful campaign with a big order. If he were lucky he would write the business in half a day, get on the *nocturno*—he liked the poetical Chilean name for a sleeper—and make his connection at the port on Saturday. If he missed the steamer there would be a two weeks wait, idling in a dusty, sunbaked, arid coastal town.

The Englishmen who were his hosts the last night before he started for Oficina Alto warned him, as they sat at dinner, that the journey would not be easy.

"To make your connections you will have to leave here at two in the morning. It takes about eight hours to ride to Alto —you should reach there before noon tomorrow; that gives you a half day in which to talk things over with the manager there, still leaving you plenty of time to get the *nocturno.* But, of course, at this time of year there is always danger of *camanchaca*—"

Gordon looked across the long table with puzzled questioning eyes.

The Englishman elucidated:

"Why, old chap, I mean fog. Pampa fog. You know we never have rain up here—and a jolly good thing we don't, too; or our nitrate would be spoiled and our business ruined. But in the winter we have fog—the famous pea soup variety that makes you lose your sense of direction and go 'round in circles." Leaning over to fill Gordon's glass with wine, he added:

"But don't you worry, old top. Of course I'll let you have a horse and pack mule, but in addition I'm going to lend you Pancho, the best *propio* I've ever known. He has never got lost on the pampa yet. Not even in a *camanchaca.* Knows every trail in the province. He will get you across safely, even if a fog should come. I'll have him wake you at two, and the houseboy will put up a bit of food for you to take along. You'll be all right!"

GORDON WOKE at the sound of a voice outside his window.

"It is I, Pancho. Come, *patrón.*" The voice was deep, rough, metallic.

Switching on the light Gordon glanced out of doors as he dressed in the sharp cold; Pancho was not to be seen. The

night, a black square framed with imported curtains, was punctuated with great stars.

Gordon dropped his bags out of the window to the dusty verandah and went through the dimly lit hall where the package of food lay ready for him. He moved quietly so as not to disturb his hosts, and, stepping outside the Administration House, he heard the rattle of bridles and the breathing of animals. A mass darker than the night was waiting at the steps; he stretched out a hand and felt the warm silky head of a horse.

The guide was strapping baggage on a grunting mule with the ease and certainty of touch belonging to men who have been more used to stars than to electric lights.

"*Patrón,*" said the voice as Gordon mounted, "unless it is very necessary for you to leave tonight I would advise you to wait a day. I have a feeling. I believe that *camanchaca* is coming."

Gordon, wrapping a muffler around his neck, said rather sharply:

"I've got to go. I must catch the Friday *nocturno* for I am on my way back to my own country. I must not miss the steamer."

"*Bueno, patrón.*" The voice was resigned. "The *camanchaca* may not come." Then a tone of pride came from the figure obscured in a heavy poncho:

"Our pampa fogs are not like any others!"

No more was said on the subject.

The world seemed lost in silence. There was not a sound anywhere, not a hint of life except in the immediate proximity where three animals trod the hard brown earth, baked for æons under the South American sun.

The lights of the *oficina* diminished in size and then disappeared behind a low hill. Gordon lifted his head to stare the sky:

"It's black as a sheet of carbon paper," he thought prosaically.

He had never become quite accustomed to the brilliance of the stars over the desert, nor the depths of blue black infinity of a pampa night. Then he relaxed, settling in the saddle, half asleep.

The hours seemed to stretch interminably. Dawn was slow in coming. The stars grew dim, but night clung to the desert as though reluctant to go. Presently Pancho spoke. His voice was alert, strong, assured, as though he had not once slackened his vigilance.

"*Patrón,* I was right. The stars are gone but day does not come. We are riding into the *camanchaca.*"

Gordon sat up stiffly in the saddle and looked about him. The air had thickened; there was a sting in it—raw and damp. To the East, where dawn should have been sweeping up from behind the rim of a sandy world, there was a deeper blackness than that of the night.

"Ah, well," he said with his salesman's limitless optimism, "we must be at least half way to Alto. I'll get there on time."

But Pancho did not answer.

A dark dim fuzz swirled around the horses; the world became a uniform, felt-like gray and, if possible, more silent than before. There was a deadening of the air as though it were insulated with wool—gray wool, thought the American.

HE WAS thoroughly awake now. At another time he would have talked to the guide for he enjoyed chatting with the *propios* who led him about the desert; it made him feel that he was getting in touch with the *roto*—the Chilean laborer; he wanted to understand every grade, every phase of humanity. But now he was silent because for the first time since his arrival in Chile with his brief case and his sales-talk he felt a qualm of anxiety. He wondered if the voice beside him would be able to lead him across the desert. As the fog came down, denser, heavier, burying him and his companion, he wondered how any living thing could find its way in the *camanchaca.* He supposed that the sun had risen somewhere, for there was a change in the surrounding tint; it was more yellowish, but still so thick that he could distinguish only with difficulty

his horse's pricked ears. He shivered as the penetrating chill searched with inquisitive fingers all about his face and neck.

Pancho was stooping in the saddle scanning the ground under his horse's hooves. Gordon did not need to ask the reason. He knew instinctively that the trail marks—hoofprints in the sand, old as the history of nitrate on the pampa and immutable because they are never washed by rain—these trail marks were the little Ariadne-thread that would lead two men to safety.

"Pancho," he said.

"Yes, *patrón*," came the ready answer. There was power in that voice, assuring the listener that Pancho would be always on the job.

"How soon should we reach Alto?"

"The fog makes going very slow, but we should be there by afternoon barring accidents."

"Accidents? You are keeping the trail beautifully. How can there be accidents?"

The voice, sonorous, strong, rolled out:

"*Patrón*, I have not seen you yet, but from your speech I know that you have courage. So I will tell you that there is a valley we must cross—a terrible valley of broken rocks. There is a bit of water seeping up, making a pool; not sweet water, *patrón*. Bitter. Salt. But it nourishes the little grasses, and on the grass a few chinchillas and vicuña browse. And because of them—there is a tiger . . . Very old he is; a deathless tiger, so men say. He has lived in the valley as long as any man hereabouts can remember. He is very wily, very wise. It is told that his hide is scarred with bullets but—he still lives. He knows, they say, that he can not be killed with a gun and for that reason he is insolent and fearless. He causes 'accidents' in the valley."

The cautious salesman in Gordon conquered the young adventurer. He said virtuously:

"Is there no way around the valley? I haven't a gun."

"Not now," came the voice laconically. "Miles back the trail parted; I chose this way through the valley because it is shorter. We can not waste time since you must catch the *nocturno*."

"Have you a gun, Pancho?"

The voice vibrated with contempt:

"Carry a gun? I? When I have my *curvo*? No!"

OUT OF the fog Gordon saw a great hairy hand come toward him, holding by the point a curved knife such as all Chilean workmen carry thrust in the long sash wound round and round their supple waists. Gordon took it.

The handle, made of alternating rings of hard rubber, brass, horn and iron, was polished so that it felt like onyx; the blade, strong, glistening, sharpened on the inner curve was repellent to the American who preferred less barbaric weapons. He gave it back.

"I've heard," he said, "that when a Chileno fights with a knife he wraps his sash around his left arm for a sort of shield. Is that true, Pancho?"

"*Sí, señor*. And sometimes two of the best of us, when we have plenty of *aguardiente* in us, borrow a sash from somebody else and tie the ends to our left ankles . . . Then we fight . . . Fight to a finish."

The voice was almost gentle. It made Gordon shudder. It went on:

"This little lady, my knife, has loved many a man. She's quick. She goes into the belly and—sk! A turn of her and—she has ended him!"

"Look here, Pancho," Gordon expostulated, angry because he suspected that the guide was pulling his leg, as the English say. "You haven't killed anybody with that knife! Your voice sounds as though you are a decent enough fellow; and besides, the manager, your boss, gave you a fine recommendation. I don't believe you!"

The voice sounded grieved:

"No, *patrón*? But it is true . . . See, I will explain. You speak my language well

—better than most gringos; and you are sympathetic—like a Chileno." Pancho innocently offered the greatest compliment that he could pay a man.

"It is like this . . . We *rotos* on the pampa get very little fun out of life. Drink, women, knives. *Nada más.* Nothing more. So my little lady-knife is everything in the world to me. She has never deceived me; she has never lied; nor stolen. And faithful? More faithful than a woman! She has ended five—" Gordon could almost hear the dramatic shrug that accompanied the words—"five—six men in different towns. You see, each time she has saved my life."

Gordon's love of the picturesque was being satisfied; his boyish vanity grew as he thought how many other foreigners miss, through faulty Spanish, such character vignettes as this. He wondered what sort of face that voice and knife belonged to. Dark skinned, of course, with big black mustaches; red-brown eyes; a skin hardened, scorched, wrinkled by the pampa wind and sun. Only yesterday he had considered the Chilean proletariat as an unwashed, drunken, brawling, brow-beaten mass of low humanity. But now it was taking a personality through this voice beside him. There were ideals, of sorts, somewhere inside Pancho; and bravery, a savage courage; and loyalty, too, even though it was only expressed in affection for a curved knife. He wondered if there was gentleness behind that voice. There were gentle tones but they might betoken merely the purring gentleness of a tiger.

The tiger. The tiger that no one had been able to kill.

Pancho broke the long silence.

"It is time to eat, *patrón.*" He threw the reins over the animals' heads so that they trailed on the ground; it was the order not to stray, understood and obeyed by all well trained pampa horses.

The fog had not altered. Sitting on the ground the two men were almost invisible to each other as they shared the package of luncheon prepared by the *oficina mozo.* Gordon caught glimpses, through gray veils, of the bent head, the dark felt hat, the big shoulders under a poncho, of his companion; but the face was a blur with its mustache and its two blots of eye sockets.

"Eat well, *patrón.* We are more than half way there. Less than twenty miles to go. I will not miss the trail. It is traced in my mind's eye. I know the way. Soon we shall be in the valley, and then I think the fog will begin to lift."

And indeed the *camanchaca* seemed to be lighter as the valley closed in on either side of them. Great cloven scarred rocks lifted up in the mist, dripping with condensed vapor that trickled down to moisten sparse grasses at their base. A sodden hollow; salt caked and ringed with rough vegetation was the so-called "pool."

The quiet seemed almost tangible to Gordon. The hooves were inaudible in the sand; the only sound was the *chink-chink* of the bridles and the squeaking of the saddles.

THE FIGURE of the guide was more distinct. Gordon could see his shape now, and the horse beneath him and the mule plodding behind. He had taken off his poncho and was occupied with his sash—unwinding it. Gordon pulled up, puzzled. He was not alarmed, but he wished to understand. He could not make out the details of the picture ahead of him—it was like the shadow on a window blind. Pancho sat at ease in his saddle unwinding yards and yards of coarse cloth from his waist, while the little lady-knife, a shadow, too, against gray mist, snuggled between his teeth. He noticed Gordon's hesitation and said as he wrapped the sash around his left arm:

"This, *patrón,* is in case *el tigre* comes. I hope to meet him."

Gordon stopped a moment, scandalized. He wondered if Pancho had brought him purposely through the valley in order to meet the tiger. Quickening his horse's pace he spoke his thoughts: "Honestly, Pancho, was it necessary to take the short cut through this valley?"

The Chilean finished wrapping the sash and carefully fastened the end before replying:

"I have been wishing to meet *señor tigre* for a long time. Other men have met him and—well—he is still alive . . . Yes . . . It is true that the valley trail is very little shorter." There was a brief chuckle:

"Yes, you've guessed that I came this way because I wanted to . . . But do not trouble. My little lady-knife will take care of you and me."

Gordon jerked his horse around.

"I'm going back to pick up the other trail!" He spoke impulsively.

It was the revolt of civilization, embodied in the person of a star salesman, against the primeval. Not fear but distaste for nature in the raw.

There was no answer. Riding a few paces he found that the mist had swallowed up the only living things in the universe. He was suddenly alone among high rock walls, dripping, frowning, dim with fog. He stopped. Silence. Pancho and the pack-mule were nowhere; he himself was nowhere. There was only the breathing of his horse and—yes—his own rapid breath together with the *drip-drip* of moisture down the rocks.

The voice spoke gently, persuasively—"*Señor?*"

Pancho was invisible, somewhere in the mist. "*Señor*, to go back is madness. Alto is but a few miles beyond the valley. To return to the other trail now would mean a night on the pampa in the mist . . . *Señor*, I have never failed a gringo yet. That is why my boss entrusted you to me. We will get to Alto safely. Only come, *patrón!*"

Gordon hesitated, feeling that the whole experience was part of a dream. It could not be true, he told himself, that he, an American salesman, should be mixed up in such a grotesque affair. Searching through the fog for a phantom tiger, indeed! And all because of the whim of a disembodied Voice . . . Ugh! Disgusting.

"I won't let myself get nervous," he thought. "I'll cross the valley just to prove that I have no part in this savage, ludicrous adventure. I am merely riding through the fog from one comfortable, well furnished, hospitable *oficina* to another, equally well furnished and comfortable. And I'll make a record sale there, too!" He added exulting:

"And then sail home!"

They rode through thinning mist. The rocks were less high. The valley was spreading out into the pampa. Pancho, a misty form riding ahead, stopped suddenly. Gordon's horse snorted and trembled. The mule reared. And even the urban and untrained sense of smell belonging to the American recognized the presence close at hand of something unpleasant and dangerous.

FROM THE depths of gray at his left came a snarl. The fog, drifting up, disclosed, ten feet away, the crouching tiger dining on a freshly killed vicuna.

Yellow insolent eyes stared at the little group facing it. Pancho made a movement as though to dismount and—the tiger sprang. Not at Pancho, but straight toward Gordon who was nearer. It clung to the horse's neck, with teeth settled in the flesh and golden eyes glaring above blood and hair, into Gordon's eyes, while claws dug into well made riding boots. The horse screamed and reared as the rider—scarcely frightened, simply astonished that this should be happening to him—beat at the square dust-colored face with his whip. Then the horse went down.

In that moment Pancho, a miracle of swiftness, hobbled his terrified horse and the mule, and then, with knife ready, stooped over the struggling mass of horse, tiger and man. There was an instantaneous flash in the misty air as the knife went home. The huge cat, wounded in the neck, leaped at the Chilean. It clung to his chest and he withstood the shock of its impact as though he were one of the nearby tawny rocks. His great legs were braced; though his tattered shirt showed

taut bronzed muscles; the thickly haired breast ran with sweat and blood. His left arm guarded his face and throat while his right hand struck again and again, and all the time his breath came from his open mouth in surges of sound that were half pain, half joy.

Then the knife slipped home straight in an angry yellow eye and *el tigre*, suddenly limp, fell, a bundle of fur that was unexpectedly soft, like a rumpled russet rug.

Gordon's horse struggled to its feet, panting. Pancho, wiping the knife on his sash that dangled in ribbons from his arm, swaggered over, torn, scratched but smiling.

Then, in the clearing air, Gordon saw his face. It was that of an ordinary Chilean *roto*; brown, sun scorched, with reddish eyes and bright teeth shaded by a mustache. He helped Gordon to his feet and felt the American's body all over with a gentle practised touch. As he wound the remnants of his sash around his middle he remarked:

"You're bruised but not really hurt . . . Say! Wasn't it a great fight, though? . . . I, Pancho, killed the tiger! Only a knife could finish him, and it was I! I who held that knife!"

THEN he turned to the horse and a crease came between his heavy black brows.

"It's my boss's horse. He'll give me hell!"

He searched the wounds with a kindly finger; there were deep cuts in the beautiful breast and neck; the animal's eyes were full of pain and bewilderment as it nuzzled up to the guide trustingly. Pancho tore bits from his shirt to staunch the horse's blood, exposing a magnificent torso seamed with many ancient scars, tokens of old knife battles, and gaping with fresh wounds. He nodded confidently:

"Not too deep, *gracias a Diós!* They will leave white marks on the hide but that won't matter. Everything will be all right. My boss will forgive me when I present to him the tiger skin."

He led the animals to the little bitter pool to drink. The fog was becoming more diaphanous, showing overhead a small circle of clear, blue sky, but in the hollows and crannies among the rocks white wreathes still lingered.

Gordon hugged to himself the thought:

"It's the first honest-to-goodness adventure I've ever had in my life! It has made me understand the *roto Chileno* . . . He is a child—a man—a human being like myself. I would have done all that he did if—if I had such courage, such strength and such joy in life!"

He sat on the ground among the dripping rocks watching the huge man-boy called Pancho finish the job in hand which was dexterously to skin—assisted by little lady-knife—the oldest, mangiest, most battered puma that Gordon had ever seen.

When it was done Pancho rolled the skin, fastened it neatly on his saddle and signified his willingness to continue the interrupted journey through the melting fog. He had fallen silent. A triumphant hunter of another race might have been chanting a pæan, but the *roto* seldom breaks into song unless he has both hands free to clap and both feet busy with the *cueca* dance. No, Pancho was not vocal in his happiness; he was thinking, not shouting it.

A faint stir of wind brushed the horses' manes and warmed the faces of the men; it swept up the skeins of fog and left the pampa bare, brown, shimmering beneath a lambent arch of sky that glowed cloudless, limitless, pitiless.

Eastward, over a shoulder of rosy sand there showed the tall black smokestack of Oficina Alto; and behind it rose the uneven ridges of the Andes, piling higher and higher, one beyond another, to faint, far snowy peaks tinged, in the afternoon light, with all the shades of a bunch of sweet-peas.

Only when they were close to the Administration House did Pancho rouse from his meditations to remark in that matter-of-fact, resounding voice of his:

"When I'm off on business for my boss

I don't drink; but when I get back to my own *oficina* tomorrow night, I'll buy myself a bottle of *aguardiente* with the money that you will have given me, *patrón*, and Knife and I will celebrate." The voice was full of expectation of delights in store.

"I shall never see you again, *patrón*. You return to your own country, but we will both remember forever—*siémpre, siémpre*, our battle with the tiger!"

Gordon mounted the verandah steps of Oficina Alto while Pancho dumped down the baggage from the mule.

"Thanks," boomed out the big voice as a firm dirty hand stowed away the price of more than one bottle of native brandy. "*Adiós!*—and—*patrón*—are you glad I took you to the valley?" The voice wheedled.

Gordon nodded.

"I'm more than glad; I'm grateful!"

Johnnie Spots by BILL ADAMS

EVER since I was shipmate with "Johnnie Spots" I have disliked cats. Johnnie flew aboard the ship when she was a day's sail southwest of the Lizard, on the way from Antwerp to Astoria. He flew straight into the cook's galley and settled on the taut wire to which "Doctor" hung his mess kits and pans. Doctor was a dirty old fellow with an untidy, pea soup stained white beard that came well down toward his middle. He couldn't make decent pea soup, cracker hash, strike-me-blind, dandyfunk, sea pie, dogsbody or duff. But he soon came to have one good point. He grew to love Johnnie Spots. His husky voice, his bleary eyes, grew softer as he watched the little flycatcher that, day after day, remained contentedly in his galley. When, a matter of ten days or so after sailing, we sighted Madeira, standing like a black pearl against the many colored sunset, we begged the doctor to shut his galley door. He refused.

"If he wants to go ashore I ain't goin' to stop him," said he.

We were bound round the Horn and should be down there in the middle of winter. So the galley door was left wide for Johnnie to go ashore if he cared to do so. Johnnie didn't care. He stayed in the galley, and throve upon cockroaches that crept in and out of the beams overhead, and all too often fell into our pea soup, cracker hash, dogsbody, strike-me-blind, dandyfunk, sea pie, or plum duff. Doctor didn't care where they fell.

Johnnie Spots was everybody's pet. He reminded the apprentice boys of the hedges of home; of elm and oak; of ash and beech; of larch and furze; of foxglove and wild white violet. When they saw him they heard the blackbirds singing in the ivy, and the song thrush in the summer larch tops. The foremost sailors, a tawny and rough worded crew, children of many slums, sensed in the little landbird a something gentle that their lives had missed. Any man of them would have let Johnnie have his scanty dinner, had Johnnie needed it.

Even the old blue-nose skipper sometimes came forward to see Johnnie; though of course he pretended that his visits were merely for the purpose of swearing at the cook for having let cockroaches fall into the cabin food. The mate often sat on the galley door coaming and, smoking a dog watch pipe, watched Johnnie flitting to and from the wire. Thanks to Johnnie, the cook and the carpenter came to be cronies.

We crossed the Line twenty days out—a good run. The clippers didn't very often do much better than that. Without losing a day in the doldrums, we ran from the northeast straight into the southeast trades; and in fifty-two days we were off the pitch of the Horn—a first rate run. We went round the Horn with the royals set, and with an easterly wind roaring on the quarter, raced through the Diego Ramirez passage just before dark fell. We were a happy ship. When, seventy-two days from Antwerp, we crossed the Line in the Pacific, the apprentice boys began to talk of making a record passage. The foremast hands ceased telling one another what smart ships their last ships had been. Our old mate beamed. Unless it were with the dirty old Doctor for now and then letting a cockroach fall into the cabin food, the skipper hadn't a fault to find with any one or any thing. You never saw a happier ship. The apprentice boys began to write letters home and every one of them told of Johnnie Spots, the shore bird who had brought us luck.

As soon as we crossed the line all hands were set to work painting ship. The brasswork was polished till it twinkled and gleamed. The standing rigging was rubbed down with a good coat of tar and varnish. While the southeast trade still rolled us northward the main deck was scoured till it was white as any rich lady's tablecloth.

When we were a few degrees north of the line the southeast trades left us. We lay becalmed one day on a blue sea, smooth as any mirror. That evening in the dog watch the old yellow whiskered Doctor joined the apprentice boys and foremast hands where they held a sing-song on the fore hatch. "Chips," the carpenter, brought out his fiddle. "Sails," the sailmaker, did a step dance, arms akimbo, hands on hips, needles sticking in his old blue jumper, seaming and roping twine hanging from his belt. We laughed and danced and sang while the mate and skipper looked on and listened from the brass railed, teakwood bridge. There wasn't a man or a boy among us, that evening, who regretted that he was a follower of the sea.

It was a cry from the mate that caused us to stop our singing and our dancing. He was rushing down the poop ladder. The skipper was shouting to us.

Every man and every boy of us saw the tail of the cabin cat as she slipped stealthily over the galley door coaming and into the galley. As, with the old Doctor in the lead, we all raced for the galley, a bit of a breeze cracked each drooping sail full; and, gathering steerageway, the ship forged ahead with the sea rippling round her, and the whitecaps rising fast.

The cat sprang from the galley with little Johnnie Spots in her mouth. As she saw us, stopped, looked quickly this way and that, the mate hurled two belaying pins at her, one after the other. They missed her. She leapt to the top of the bulwark and raced along it toward the cabin. Johnnie's wings were fluttering. Every man and every boy was running breathlessly. Some of our faces were white as if a hurricane squall were close upon the ship, or as if a shipmate were fallen overboard.

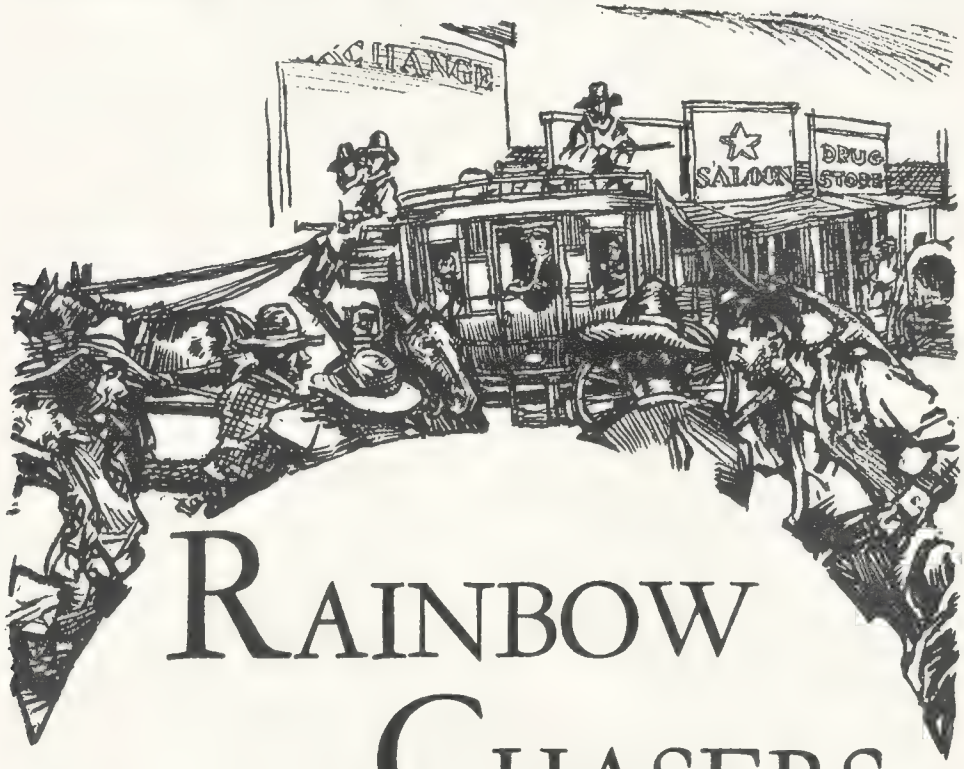
Just as the ship rolled over and dipped her long rail low to the newly wakened, blue, mid-ocean swell, the mate's hand was almost on the cat. She leapt to escape his hand; then, failing to grip the hard teakwood, slipped, struggled wildly for an instant, and fell into the sea.

His little wings outspread, Johnnie Spots lay motionless upon the water. A sharp puff of wind urged the ship ahead. A long beseeching *meee-ow* reached our ears from the swirl of the wake astern. We paid no heed to it.

There was no more song or dance that evening. Before dark the wind hauled ahead, and blew direct in our teeth. It remained so for two weeks.

We were all of a hundred and ten days to Astoria—a hundred and ten days out, instead of ninety—a ship whose luck had left her.

A Novelette of Bonanza Days and the Throbbing Life of a Western Boom Town



RAINBOW CHASERS

By HUGH PENDEXTER

CHAPTER I

LEADVILLE

CHESTNUT Street was roaring. Six thousand people filled the sidewalks and crowded into the road, where freight outfits and Concord coaches struggled to keep in motion. From daylight to daylight this congestion continued. Bull whips exploded over horses which could not advance. Volleys of oaths were hurled at the massed humanity which could not get out of the way.

Chestnut Street was Leadville, and the town was boom wild. In the alleys extending back from this main thoroughfare lurked as desperate a collection of men as ever invited Judge Lynch's attention.

In some respects the situation was unparalleled. In '65 the town "went down", —was hogged out. Another dozen years found it the miracle town of the Rockies, pitched almost overnight into such a fever of greed and prosperity as history seldom records. Frame shanties, gambling hells and dance halls alternated with the substantial business blocks. Tents sprang up on every vacant spot like

so many soiled mushrooms. The town was long since filled up, and yet the silver crazed miners poured in.

There were four lines of coaches bringing newcomers from the railhead at Webster, each line shuttling in four loads a day—eighty human beings. Another coach line ceaselessly hauled in more rainbow chasers from Cañon City. Individuals found a fat profit in carrying passengers in all sorts of vehicles. The population jumped from eight thousand in May to twelve thousand by October first. One more month would see it more than doubled.

This town, living largely in one street, was filled with money. The ground was yielding undreamed fortunes. Realty values increased with the population; and crime trebled while wealth doubled. Day in and day out there was no surcease of the din in the mile of Chestnut Street.

Leon Clint, mountain camp wise, had never seen the like. Denver in its busiest days was a sleepy town compared with this young sister in the mountains. Peculiarly enough, Denver had ignored Leadville and had scoffed at the notion of anything worthwhile emanating from it. As a result it was Eastern capital that

rushed in to pick up the bonanza offerings; and the criminal world awoke to its chance. Never did gamblers reap a richer harvest. Never did confidence men and thugs work more industriously and successfully.

Leon Clint prided himself on his sophistication. He was vastly annoyed at finding himself caught in the endless Leadville jam. He had arrived from Cañon City and had been deposited in the midst of the struggling, blaspheming mass before he could realize what was before him. A bullwhacker's lash cut across his shoulders, and his hand would have gone to a gun if he could have moved his arms. There was a swirl at his back and on his left, grotesquely like a fish making a strike, and strong arms were thrown about him. An unsavory hulk of a man at his left was coolly thrusting a hand across his breast and into his inside pocket to pull out five hundred dollars in greenbacks. It did Clint no good to curse or cry out in such a bedlam. Yet he did protest most savagely, and attempted to kick the man behind him. Instantly he was shoved violently ahead to bump against an old man. The latter endeavored to face about, and cried fiercely—

"Tryin' to rob me?"

"Trying to keep from knocking you off your feet. I'm the one who's been robbed," shouted Clint. "They rammed me against you."

He struggled to turn around, but a hairy faced man in a red shirt pushed him along. Then he realized the uselessness of it all. He advanced, now side by side with the old man, and said:

"Sorry to bump into you so, but some one gave me a push just as another stole my money. What sort of burg is this?"

"Hell on foot, younker. Hogged out?"

"Not quite. But if I see the man who robbed me I'll know him again. Big as a shanty."

"Better forgit him," advised the old man. "Here! Crowd in behind this freight wagon, then to the sidewalk, then into Murphy's where you can git a drink."

Clint was anxious to get out of the street. Clapping a hand on the old man's shoulder, he followed closely, and the two finally fought their way to a foothold on the sidewalk. It required some maneuvering to get into the saloon, but once inside they found room at the end of the long bar.

"Ain't this town a daisy?" exclaimed the old man admiringly.

"You called it something else out on the street. I think I will eat. Folks are eating at the table. You'll eat with me."

For the first time the old man took time to look Clint over.

"What's your name? What's your game?" he inquired.

"Leon Clint, fortune hunter, rainbow chaser. And your name, if we're going to be curious?"'

"Old Carbonate. I was one of the first—of course I claim I was *the first*—to tell the fools that the heavy, reddish sand, and the big reddish black rocks, is carbonate of lead, carrying much silver. Idiots had been cussin' it and passin' it up and huntin' for gold. They began callin' me Old Carbonate, and it stuck. Where is your fortune to be found? Along what trail?"

"Faro, poker, monte, real estate, mining property."

"Faro and poker are healthy, nourishin' games, but I don't like that Spanish top and bottom layout. Been cleaned too many times. But if that thief cleaned you out, then the trail's sort of closed to you, huh?"

"Got a little side money left. But if I can find the sneak who picked my pocket while another held my arms—"

"Just what will you do?"

"Shove a gun under his nose and make him fork over."

"And have him yelp to his mates that he's being robbed. Let's fight our way to that corner table. If a waiter can't git to us we'll at least have a squattin' place."

He started. They left a wake of trodden feet and hearty curses, but gained their objective.

As the two ate deer meat Clint's eyes searched the shifting crowd. Old Carbonate asked—

"Where'll you put up?"

"Out in the pines and sage somewheres, with the sky for a blanket. I've fifty stored away, but I can't waste that on beds."

"What you goin' to do to git started?"

"Rap the tables till I can get a stake together and go prospecting."

"Know anything about prospectin'?"

"Have done some placer mining."

OLD CARBONATE sighed for the days when a man might be in bonanza with the aid of pick, shovel and pan. He quietly explained:

"The prospectin' game here is different than it used to be. Silver's the big card. Fools have been tryin' not to find it since '63. Kept rollin' big rocks out the way that was heavy as lead. Cussin' blue streaks along of the reddish sand they couldn't wash out of the fine gold. When I struck it and found it was the same specific gravity as gold I got cur'ous. Of course, I found it was carbonate of lead, loaded almost with pure silver."

"You don't think I'd stand much chance because of my ignorance?"

"Not in Nevada, Californy, nor the Northern camps; but here, your ignorance prob'ly will save your hide. Why, I could have bought the Robert E. Lee for fifteen hundred dollars, but I knew the game too well. Had the money, but wouldn't have given fifteen dollers. No siree! I know the game backward. A wise old bird. I could see there was nothin' there but a lot of exercise. And they took out a hundred and eighteen thousand dollers in twenty-four hours at a cost of less than three hundred dollers. If some machinery hadn't busted they'd took out a hundred and fifty thousand. Being ignorant of the game, you ought to make a hit. Two fool shoemakers from Pittsburg made us laugh till we was sick by startin' diggin' on top of a hill. And at twenty-eight feet down they struck what's now called The Little Pittsburg. Worth millions and millions . . .

"But you mustn't sleep outdoors. I have a shack, if the lot jumpers ain't tore it down since sunset. You can turn in there and welcome. If the jumpers come you can pay for your lodgin's by helpin' me stand 'em off."

"Gladly. I'll stand them off alone. I'll—"

He broke off to stare at a fresh stream of people from the street. Then he was softly saying:

"Look! Look! The two men at the head of the line. Now they are at the foot of the bar. See the red shirt? And the big man? Hairy face. Red shirt held my arms, pushed me against your venerable back. T'other one took my money."

As Clint rose from his seat Old Carbonate seized his wrist and growled:

"What's the game now? You can't 'dentify money. What you thinkin' of doing?"

"Climb Hairy Face and make him fork over."

"And have the whole line lickin' your head in!"

The warning was timely. Clint sent his scowling glance up and down the bar, seeking an inspiration. Beyond the lower end of the bar was a door. He asked his companion:

"Where does that door lead? Chance to duck out?"

"Nary a chance. Opens into a card room where they trim suckers. They'll take a rich Easterner in there, lock the door and skin him to the hide."

Clint sat down and finished his supper; but as he ate his gaze was ever wandering up and down the line of boisterous drinkers. Coming to his feet, he announced:

"I must prospect that bunch. I sha'n't start a fight. They've robbed so many people they won't recognize me. You stay here."

He began working toward the bar. He jerked about as he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Old Carbonate.

Behind the big man Clint stood and

surveyed his huge bulk for a moment.

"Hurry up with that bottle!" bellowed the red shirted man.

"In just a second, Knifer, please," cried the nearest bartender.

"He's a hellion," whispered Carbonate. "Feller next to him is Bill Cain."

A SURGE of the crowd sent Clint against Cain. With a roar the man turned and grabbed Clint with one huge hand. Instantly he received a kick on the shins that caused him to yelp in pain and rage and snatch his hand away. Before he could make another move Clint was loudly proclaiming:

"If you want to fight just step into that room alone with me. I've got fifty dollars that says I can lick you."

Bill Cain would gladly have grabbed him by the neck and dragged him into the card room for the privilege of robbing him of five dollars. He grinned savagely at the young man, obviously a newcomer who did not know to whom he was talking.

"So that's the way the little kitty jumps, eh? Then just put up your money with the barkeep. If you walk from that room it's yours."

"Fine. What about your fifty? Can't you raise fifty?"

Cain had not recognized him. Glaring wrathfully, he pulled out a package of greenbacks, stripped off the amount of the wager and handed it to an obsequious bartender. Then he nodded to the man in the red shirt and said—

"My friend here will go along to see fair play."

The knowing ones grinned broadly at the idea of Bill Cain needing a referee to protect him from unfair tactics.

"He'll go as far as the door along of me," spoke up Old Carbonate. "The two of us will wait outside till the fuss is over." He spoke carelessly, but his heart ached for the young man.

"I usually go where I want to," said Knifer softly. "I've seen you before. I'm going to remember you."

"This time you want to stay outside that door. And I shall remember you. We'll pass the time tellin' each other pretty stories." Carbonate decorated his nonsense by dropping a hand on his heavy .45.

"Stand outside, Knife. I'll need lots of room to swing him in. We'll both leave our guns."

The crowd was all tiptoe with excitement. Wagers were vainly offered on the outcome of the fight until Old Carbonate, because of loyalty to his new acquaintance accepted a bet of three to one and placed a hundred dollars in the bartender's hands. Clint and Cain walked to the door, followed by their two seconds. Each handed over his lethal weapons, and Clint told his backer—

"I'll be out in a few minutes."

"Make it quick," urged Old Carbonate, with a deep yawn.

He dreaded the spectacle he should behold when the door next opened. Knifer glared down at the old man and whispered—

"You won't see this dude alive again."

Clint stepped aside so that Cain should enter the room first. His object in doing this was to bolt the door to keep the partisans out. The room was some twelve feet square, and a big table occupied the center. Cain tipped this up against the wall with a flourish of one hand and faced his adversary and paused to gloat.

"Are you all ready?" asked Clint, his arms hanging limply.

"I be. I'm 'bout to—"

THE HEEL of Clint's palm, backed by a stiff arm, caught him under the chin and caused his jaws to grind together and his big head to snap back. Almost at the same moment the young man's fist was buried in the fat stomach, instantly followed by a left hook to the jaw, then a right that bounced Cain's head against the wall. The double tattoo caused those outside the door to grin in happy anticipation. Old Carbonate was an exception, but he forced a smile.

Inside the room Cain was swinging his

arms wildly. Ignorant of boxing, and softened by his excesses, he found his bulk a hindrance rather than a help. He always had fought with every advantage on his side. Clint's stiff smashes were wrecking him. He could feel his eyes closing, feel his vision going. Shrieking like a wild animal, he endeavored to flounder clear of the terrible wall which seemed to leap forward and smite him. Then a blow, starting from the hip, and having behind it every ounce of Clint's one hundred and sixty pounds, caught him under the ear. He slumped to the floor.

Working with great haste, Clint explored the man's pockets and found his money, minus the amount of the wager. Then he paused for a moment to brush his hair with his hands and rearrange his necktie.

The sound of the blows caused those in the know to shiver with brutal expectancy and picture the sight they would behold when the door opened. They heard the bolt scrape and they gave ground. Knifer grinned malevolently at his friends and chuckled silently as he observed Old Carbonate's somber eyes.

"Where'll you have the pup sent, old man?" he asked.

Before Carbonate could think of a reply the door was suddenly thrown wide, and Clint stood on the threshold. Beyond him, visible to those who could view the interior of the card room, was a woefully beaten mass propped against the wall.

"Gawdfrymighty!" cried Knifer weakly, his hand crawling to the weapon from which he derived his name.

Old Carbonate's eyes filled with tears of joy. His throat felt tight. The crowd drew back as Clint advanced to the bar and said to the stakeholder—

"My gun and the wagers, please."

The bartender hesitated. The rough element in the saloon greatly outnumbered the decent. And the latter had no community of interest, as they were mostly strangers to one another.

"I reckon we'll wait till Cain says it was on the level," said the bartender.

"Looks like foul play!" shouted a deep voice.

The long barrel of Carbonate's .45 slid over Knifer's shoulder, and the old man's voice was as strident and peremptory as a rattlesnake's warning as he growled—

"Even Frodsham can't save your hide, you poor fool, if you don't hand over my friend's wager and mine."

THE BARTENDER glanced toward the big man at the back of the room, Frodsham, acknowledged leader of the lot jumpers. Then he looked into the muzzle of the .45; and he hastily handed over the money and Clint's gun. Men were now crowding into the card room. Old Carbonate leaned against the bar, spinning his revolver. He told Clint—

"Walk to the end of the bar and wait for me."

Those at the bar fell back as Clint passed to the street end of the room, his retreat covered by Carbonate's .45. Halting near the door, he drew his weapon and stood guard until his friend joined him. They backed to the door, with Carbonate flinging behind him the warning—

"It won't be safe for anybody to be bustin' loose from this place for the next two minutes."

With that they gained the sidewalk and plunged into the milling mass. Fighting against the currents of traffic, the two finally gained the opposite side of the street. Instead of turning to right, or left, Carbonate passed between the buildings and gained the sage brush. Much of the clamor of the town left behind, Old Carbonate threw himself on the ground and breathed in deep relief.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "When I heard Frodsham chippin' in I reckoned we was in for a fight. But I'm sartain now Frodsham decided to wait, but he ain't forgot us. Oh, no!"

"A cheap bunch of crooks," snarled Clint. "I'm going to catch that boy in the red shirt and swing on him."

"You keep away from Knifer, my son.

He earned his name. Not once in a million years can you pull off what you did in that card room. Now tell me all about it, every little scrid. Just burnin' up with curiosity."

Clint was silent for a bit, as if assembling his recollections of the battle in orderly array. Then he said:

"I hit him several times and took my money from him. That's about all that happened in the card room. Where we going from here?"

"Dawggone! But I'll have the story of that battle out of you if I have to choke it from you. Goin' to my shack on my eighteen hundred doller lot that I bought for two hundred and fifty dollers a month ago. For a mile along here, the ground is all staked out. Named it Harrison Avenue. Lot jumpers are worse'n the seven plagues of Egypt. But let's be movin'. Only a bit of a walk now. That's my place ahead. Remember, you're a marked man from now on—Mighty queer—light burnin'. Old Man Vail must 'a' dropped in to see me."

Even as he spoke the light vanished. A heavy voice called:

"Who are you? What do you want? Don't skulk back there. We can see you."

"Damn' their pesky hides! They've jumped me!" whispered Old Carbonate. "I can make out three figgers."

Then he raised his voice and called: "Hello, the house! Two men wantin' a place to sleep."

"Clear out, or you'll wake up in a big bedroom in hell!" warned the deep voice.

Clint felt his gun yanked from his belt. The next moment the old man, with both guns cocked, was racing ahead and crying:

"Come on, boys! We've bagged 'em this time."

With that he opened fire at the vague figures standing in front of the house. Clint took his cue and shouted wildly. The lot jumpers, perhaps fearing that they had been surrounded, leaped away into the brush, one man limping and another holding his broken arm.

"Makes twice in two weeks I've had to shoot my way into my own home," said Carbonate. "Come in and I'll fix up some grub. I don't think they'll come back tonight. They usually come in broad daylight. Big and bold as Billy-be-damn'. Tomorrow I'll take you to a real home—the Vails. Friends I spoke of."

CHAPTER II

CLINT BUYS A LOT

NEXT morning, while cooking ham and eggs, Old Carbonate repeated his warning to Clint.

"You're a marked man. Don't go out after nine o'clock at night. Don't pass close to the mouth of an alley, day or night. And they won't be slow to jump you almost anywhere even in the daytime."

"I don't see as I can go out at all. What about you? You stood by me. Looks as if I had drawn you into trouble."

"I've got so much cussed trouble with these lot jumpers that what you fetch along won't make much difference. You haven't any particular line of business?"

"Just looking for chances. Play cards some. Speculate in mining property, in land, in horses. Anything to turn a decent profit."

"Small chance in mining property here for you. Easterners got the bulge on us. They control all the big mines."

"I'm after a small mine. I'll find one and sell it," Clint promptly decided. "The way this town acts up I'd say any ten foot hole ought to find an easy market among the Easterners."

"Prob'ly will. I know one, just ten foot deep, that sold for ten thousand. Good joke on the Eastern buyers till it paid half a million in eight months."

Clint nodded and remained silent for a minute. Then he said:

"Carbonate, you've been kind to me. I'll tell you, and no one else, that I have an ace up my sleeve. You've heard of the Espinosas?"

"Good land! Have I heard of the moon? Who ain't heard of those murderers? Killed some forty people in cold

blood. Thank the Lord they're wiped out! What truck could you have along of them?"

Clint did not reply for a bit. The Espinosas had won a place in mountain history because of their terrible deeds. Beginning in the spring of 1863 the inhabitants of El Paso County were horrified by a series of mysterious murders. The assassins' trail was found near the Red Hill and followed southwest of Pike's Peak. The murders continued until one of the brothers was shot in South Park. The other was killed by the veteran mountain man, Tom Tobin, near Veta Pass. Clint explained briefly—

"What the Espinosas or their followers hid is the ace I have in my sleeve."

Old Carbonate grimaced.

"They didn't seem to kill for profit; more like crazy men."

"Those who went with them took a profit. A big one—all in gold."

"Mebbe. But it almost seems best that it never should be found. Might fetch bad luck."

"Still folks are always keen to find pirate gold. How much of Leadville's money that hasn't been stolen by some one, at some time, that hasn't passed through the hands of a murderer? I'm not superstitious. I'm taking a whack at it."

"Then you must have some idee where it's to be found," prompted Old Carbonate.

"A mighty good idea. No blind chase for me. You've stood by me. What say if we throw together and split even."

Carbonate was not enthusiastic. His love for adventure had kept him on a wanderer's path, and he retained a boy's zest for prying into the unknown. The dour face of danger had never kept him from a strange path. To balance this blind urge was a fine discrimination in choosing his partners. Clint had appealed to him because of his readiness to fight for his money. So far as he had gaged the young man he liked him, but he required more than a twelve hour acquaintanceship to reach a definite decision.

"Probably a wild goose chase," he remarked. "But we'll talk about it later—Why, if here ain't Hiram Vail, as honest a man as ever wore shoe leather! All dressed up! Wonder why he ain't at work."

He jumped up and ran to the door to greet the newcomer.

Vail was inclined to be portly. The suggestion was augmented by his bushy goatee. The solemn, almost sanctimonious expression of the florid face, rather than the long Prince Albert coat, reminded Clint of a church elder back East.

Carbonate greeted his friend as warmly as if they had been parted for years. He stood off for a better perspective and gazed at him admiringly.

"Well, if clothes don't suit you, Hiram," he exclaimed.

"I believe one should do oneself justice," replied Vail modestly, as he stared over his friend's shoulder to take inventory of Clint. Carbonate remembered his manners and made the two known to each other, and then inquired—

"You've had your breakfast, of course?"

VAIL pursed his lips as if weighing his answer.

"In a way of speaking, yes. That is, I took my place at the table. In the way of real victuals I must say no. Reckon I'll have a snack of your prime ham and eggs."

An extra plate was put on the table and heaped with food. Old Carbonate inquired:

"How happen you're loafin', dressed like a Roman king. Thought you had to work overtime."

"Pump broke down," Vail explained huskily between mouthsful. "My shift laid off till it can be mended. And I ain't wanted round the house. Lawd knows I ain't welcome anywhere unless it's here."

"Minnie on the rampage again?" Carbonate radiated admiration as he asked the rather personal question. To Clint he explained—

"Minnie's his wife."

"Yes, my wife," sighed Vail. "A good

woman, but stingy. The boy and girl get more to eat than I do, but not enough. Far from enough. Well, that's my hard luck. What's new, Carbonate?"

"Nothin'—oh, I was forgettin'. We was jumped last night by some Frodsham's gang. Come home as innercent as kittens and found the skunks in possession."

"They tried to jump us while I was at the mine, but Minnie fired a double-barrel shotgun out the window and peppered half a dozen pair of legs. Kill any of yours?"

"Hit two or more. Next time old Frodsham sets 'em on to me there will be several burials. What you doin' with your holiday?"

"Nothing. Just keeping clear of the house. Thought I'd walk over and ask you to eat dinner with us. Sort of make it easier for me. But just how Minnie will take an extry I can't say."

"I'm dining elsewhere, Mr. Vail," said Clint.

"No, siree!" roared Vail with unexpected warmth. "My wife can starve me, but I'll be jiggered if she can keep me down all the time."

"That's the proper spirit, Hiram. Don't lose your self-respect," encouraged Carbonate.

"I won't. You're coming with Carbonate, Mr. Clint. I want to find out just where I stand in my own home."

"Thanks, but I've promised to eat with a friend."

Vail finished a hearty meal and stretched his arms and exclaimed:

"Lawdy! If a man could have a breakfast like that every morning instead of mush, or porridge. I git five dollars a day on the pump. The girl fetches home her wages. She works in a dry goods store. It would seem that we have money enough coming in to live decent. But you know how close Minnie is, Carbonate. Good woman, but narrow in some ways."

"Er-huh. I understand Minnie pretty well. Boy on the same job?"

Vail slowly shook his head.

"I've tried to shame him, but he seems to be a scatterbrain. Can't take it from his mother, as all her folks was misers. None behind me that I know of, who was scared of honest work. Fact is, town's too fast for him. Swept off his feet with so much hoorooin', and wild talk about picking up million dollar mines. I wouldn't mind so much if there wasn't the danger of his gitting in with the wrong kind of people."

Old Carbonate shook his head sorrowfully.

"Hard to drive that kind. But sometimes you can coax them along. Good stuff in the boy. Clint and me may take a little rainbow chasin' trip. We might take him along."

"I'd have to see and talk with the young man first," Clint said hurriedly. "There may be a certain amount of danger in my project."

"Danger!" scoffed Vail, his broad face now shining. "When you project danger my son Bert will eat it up. Fine lad. You'll like him. You'll meet him this noon."

Once more Clint explained that he had an engagement with a friend, but neither of the two men appeared to hear it. He was much disappointed by Carbonate's readiness to take on partners in the search for the hidden gold. He did not bother again to refuse the dinner invitation.

AFTER Vail had departed Old Carbonate said—

"Sort of feel touchy along of my speaking of your business?"

"Why, I had supposed we would keep it to ourselves," Clint frankly admitted.

The old man chuckled.

"Might as well try to hush up folks when they talk about a pirate's treasure. Lots of folks out here have wondered if the Espinosas got much gold; and if they did, where did they hide it? Some have tried to find it ahead of you. But you, mebbe, have a pretty straight tip."

"I know where it is," said Clint quietly.

"Dawggone, you young bluffer! Almost had me believing it. Never mind. It'll

be good exercises for you. Let's look at the town. I won't bother to wash the dishes as the shack prob'ly will be jumped while we're away. I won't leave clean plates for the scuts to eat from."

Clint put on his hat and asked—

"Just who is this Frodsham you have mentioned several times?"

"Stepbrother to the devil. Got a big crowd behind him. Just sticks to jumpin' lots. Been in court lots of times, but the gang is ready to swear him clear. Some of his crowd go in for murder and robbery."

The two walked through the sagebrush toward Chestnut Street. Near the thoroughfare they came upon an animated scene. A small mob of men were driving carpenters from the framework of a house.

"There you have it!" cried Carbonate softly. "Frodsham's gang has jumped it."

"And those men will let the roughs run them off?" demanded Clint in deep disgust.

"They're builders, not fighters," said Carbonate. "Now the jumpers will tear down what's built and put up a new frame with new lumber. Frodsham is clever that way. Makes it look as if he was honest and only wanted his own."

The man who was directing the work of destruction turned around and called:

"Hi, there, you two men. Clear out. You're not wanted here."

"You couldn't run me out if I belonged here," Clint told him.

The man started toward him. One of his men halted him and whispered, and he studied Clint with new interest. Then, in disgust, he cried:

"That runt lick Bill Cain? Don't make me laugh. I've got a sore lip."

"Put your gun to one side along with mine and I'll lick you as easily as I licked Cain," challenged Clint.

"Hush, hush," murmured Old Carbonate. "You can't fight every one in Leadville."

"I can fight some of them," answered Clint. "Especially if they are jumpers."

The dispossessed owner now sidled up to Clint. He was a small man with watery eyes. Clutching Clint's arm, he asked eagerly—

"What'll you give me for rights in this place, mister." He spoke softly so as not to be overheard by the jumpers.

"You quitting, and not coming back?"

"I sure be. No man can own and hold a house in this tarnation place. I gave five hundred for the lot. Cleared it and started to build. I was offered fifteen hundred for it a week ago. But, like a fool, I held out for more. I'm through. A gang runs things here. Police are in with 'em, I reckon. My title's good. But if you haven't guts to defend it you don't want it at any price. I'm no fighter."

"His title is as good as mine," spoke up Old Carbonate. "But you don't want to mix in."

Clint pondered for a minute and then decided:

"I think I do want to chip in. I'll give you two hundred dollars for the lot and what's left of the building."

"You own a prime lot," said the man heartily. "Just wait till I can draw up a paper, passing title to you."

He went to one side and with a piece of paper on a board began writing. The leader of the toughs was both curious and angry. He approached Clint belligerently and demanded:

"Just what's your game here, mister? You're not wanted here. You're trespassing."

Clint made no reply. The bully took fresh heart and became profanely abusive. Old Carbonate tried to pull his companion away. It hurt him to see the great change in Clint. In the beginning he had been brash enough, too much so, Carbonate thought. And now, silence. Clint shook off the friendly hand and remained staring at the foul mouthed bully.

"And you was saying you could cut my comb if I'd put my gun aside," he jeered. "Well, I ain't going to bother to unbelt my gun, but I'm going to knock you so far you can't even write back."

With that warning he swung a tremen-

dous blow at Clint's head. Clint did not move from his tracks. He simply ducked and rolled his head, then with an uppercut he lifted his man from the ground and measured him on his back. Without turning his head he demanded—

"That transfer ready, neighbor?"

"Here goes my name. Gimme the money afore he gits up."

STILL watching the prostrate figure, Clint handed over his roll and told his companion:

"Pay him two hundred out of that. But first see if the paper reads all right, and have two of the men witness it."

"All hunkydory. A sweet lambastin' you give him," cried Carbonate. "Mister Man, have two of your men witness that paper and then take your two hundred."

The bully scrambled to his feet and glared wrathfully at Clint. One hand stole toward a gun, but the young man shook his head slowly and the hostile gesture ended.

"Here's your paper, signed by two other men," said the original owner. "It's your lot now, if you can hold it."

Clint snatched the paper and hastily read it through. Satisfied, he drew a gun and advanced on the gaping ruffians. He fired a shot through a board that a man was trying to tear loose from a joist.

"Next one through your thick head. Every one off my property."

As a token he sent two more bullets close to as many shaggy heads. With cries of fear the ruffians ceased their labors and stampeded. Clint wheeled about and found Carbonate toying with a .45 and closely watching the leader. Clint motioned for the latter to turn about. As the man obeyed, his gun was yanked from his belt and hurled far into the sagebrush.

"Vamoose!"

The one word, accented by a foot drawn back for a kick, sent the man racing after his mates.

"You didn't oughter do this," said Old Carbonate.

"You ran them off from your place."

"Sure. My title never was questioned. But you've jumped in, not to defend a home, but to buy one. Frodsham will go into court with a crowd of witnesses. The man you bought it of has skedaddled. Frodsham will say you're a jumper. More likely he'll have you dropped at night, and the matter won't ever git into court."

"This is my property, the first home I ever owned," Clint insisted. "They may tear down the rest of the building, but they can't steal the lot. If I find any roughs here again I'll shoot them out from under their hats."

"That's powerful talk to pass along with war terbaccer, but you can't fight all the crooks in Leadville. Well, let's be gittin' on. Sure you won't go to the Vails?"

"Absolutely sure. A man who lets his wife run him shouldn't tell the neighbors about it, nor ask company home to dinner."

"Very good. Now I'll show you the best eatin' place in Leadville. Then I'll eat with the Vails. You walk ahead and I'll keep you covered from behind. Take the middle of the street when you strike into Chestnut. Keep away from the alleys."

They turned into the milling mass of vehicles and the crowding, complaining mass of humanity.

"Where's the Clarendon Hotel?" Clint asked over his shoulder.

"Out to hell'n' gone. Folks 'r' crazy to build way out there in the brush."

Before the summer was over The Clarendon was to be the heart of the new metropolis.

"I was going to take you in there to eat," Clint explained.

"I'm eating with the Vails. But I'll pick you the best place in town. Turn in between these two stores."

This course took them away from the congested street and into a recently opened section.

"There's nothing out here in the way of restaurants," complained Clint.

"Best place in town for eats. Too far out to be crowded. Turn in here."

"Dammit! I'm not a horse. Stop driving me. Walk along at my side. Why, this must be a private house."

Clint halted at the foot of steps leading to a small veranda. The door swung open with a bang and Hiram Vail, in a hard boiled shirt, but lacking his long coat, stood with both hands extended. Through Clint's mind there flashed an old woodcut from a child's history, depicting Samoset welcoming the Pilgrims at what was to be Plymouth.

"You darned old liar!" Clint muttered at Carbonate.

"Best place in town to eat—nary a lie. I'm going to eat with the Vails. My words, I stick to 'em. Howdy, Hiram. My young friend changed his mind and came along for dinner."

"Your young friend is going—"

Clint halted as if suddenly deprived of the power of speech. A brown haired, demured eyed young woman was now standing beside Vail. Her eyes danced; she was beautiful.

WITHOUT any formality she ran down the steps and extended a slim hand, saying:

"We're powerful glad to meet you, Mr. Clint. Daddy has been telling us that you were coming to dinner. I'm Blanche Vail. And here is mother."

Clint blushed and shifted his gaze. A plump, smiling matron, with kindly gray eyes, was bustling down the steps to seize his hand and work it as she would a pump handle.

"Mighty glad you came along. When that Hiram told me I was afraid he was lying again. Don't ever believe anything he tells you."

"I never will again," said Clint.

With an ominous glance at her spouse, Mrs. Vail went on—

"Probably told you he was half starved, that he had a stingy wife."

"Now, mother. Now, mother," weakly expostulated Vail.

"Yes, he did," frankly confessed Clint. "And he has his mate in the man behind me."

"Hiram Vail never said a word, Minnie, he wouldn't say right in front of you and the children. And, Minnie—"

"Shut up, you old hypocrite. Come right in, Mr. Clint. We're ready to sit down."

They filed into the house and the matron bustled about in the final preparation of the dinner. The girl removed a huge turkey from the oven, and Hiram, beaming of countenance, tucked a napkin under his chin and proceeded to serve.

Old Carbonate noticed the vacant chair and asked—

"Where's Bert?"

Mrs. Vail dropped a spoon on the floor. Her husband looked worried. The girl lost her smile, but she was quite brave, and replied readily:

"He'll be here soon. He must be here soon."

But he did not come. His absence clouded the feast, although the Vails endeavored not to allow their worries to reach their guests. After the dinner and an hour of chatting Clint rose to go. Ordinarily he would have enjoyed remaining. But there was a restraint, a makebelieve that told him the family should be left alone. They followed him to the door, Old Carbonate electing to stay longer. The girl walked with him to the rough beginning of a street, her eyes no longer sparkling. She explained:

"Your coming has helped us a lot. We have been a bit unhappy, you know. My brother hasn't been home since yesterday morning. He's only seventeen and very notional. He's a good boy at heart, but easily influenced. Father pleased us very much by saying you would take him on a trip into the mountains. He seems to crave excitement. If you can get him away from Leadville for a bit I'm sure his thoughts will straighten out."

"Where I am going there will be much excitement, perhaps. Very likely there will be some danger, Miss Blanche."

He glanced down and was surprised

to discover that he was holding her hand.

"I shall be pleased to take him along," he said, and departed.

CHAPTER III

AFTER THE POT OF GOLD

CLINT was disgruntled. He was committed to taking an irresponsible young man along on the treasure quest. He was incensed at his own asininity in prematurely divulging his secret to Old Carbonate. He was angry that the latter should have mentioned the secret to Vail. All in all, he was in a fretful state of mind as he swung into the confusion of Chestnut Street and forced his way through the crush of pedestrians.

As he ate his supper in a crowded restaurant he read the partial record of yesterday's crimes in the *Reveille*, the town's first newspaper. For one interested in crimes there was no place in the United States offering more for a dime. The sheet was filled with holdups and other rascalities. Had Old Carbonate failed to enlighten him on the necessity of going armed, the newspaper would have supplied that warning. An editorial stated that conditions were so deplorable as to keep all but the reckless, drunk and vicious indoors after dark unless taking to the street in company of stanch friends.

Clint believed that this statement was somewhat overdrawn, for surely all the mass of milling men swarming the long thoroughfare could not be even potential criminals. Yet the instances cited, as occurring during the last twenty-four hours, surely portrayed a very vicious condition of affairs. Men were named who were robbed at their doors and in their beds. There was no denying that miners went about in squads for self-protection.

Finishing his supper, he made his way to the Keno. He was not keen to play, but he did not care to return to Carbonate's shack ahead of the old man. Gregarious by nature, he craved companionship. He watched a faro game and decided that the bank was not adding it to its natural advantage by any crooked play. He wagered modestly at first and ran about even. Then he plunged until he was four hundred dollars ahead.

From faro he shifted to the "top and bottom" table. The patronage was so heavy that the monte dealer was running out each deal without drumming up trade. Dropping fifty, he passed on to the twenty-one and secured a seat. He became conscious of some one leaning against his chair. When he glanced up he recognized the man as one who had stood beside him at the monte layout. At the end of the deal he made for the end of the room where several poker games were in progress. Again he found himself near the man who had kept at his side ever since he entered the place. The man's nose was flattened, as if by a terrific blow. Pressing close to him, Clint said—

"Don't trail me any more."

The man was taken aback, but attempted to bluster—

"You own this place?"

"Remember, don't follow me any more!"

With that he crossed the room. At the exit he turned and looked back. The man stood at the bar, talking with another who stood with his back to the door. As he talked his eyes were focused on Clint. Then Clint went outside.

He stepped to one side and peered through the window. The man with the flat nose was making for the door with a swarthy faced fellow. At the door the two halted and one turned back to the bar. The swarthy one took to the street. He glanced up and down, craning his neck, his eyes searching sharply. Clint came forward and stood at his elbow. The fellow was startled, but quickly recovered his composure and began whistling, his gaze idly roving over the animated scene.

Clint caught him behind the ear with a blow, knocking him down, and slipped into the endless procession of men.

When he came to the turn which lead through the sagebrush to Old Carbonate's home, he struggled clear of the procession. Then he walked with a gun in his hand.

He came to the partly demolished framework of the house which he had bought, and was surprised to find any of it standing. He sighted a light in Carbonate's place before he could distinguish the building. As he came up to the door he heard voices. Inside he beheld a young man whose face was familiar. He placed his age at nineteen, or twenty, and was wondering where he had seen him before, when Old Carbonate called out:

"Wonderin' where in sin you might be. This is Bert, our new partner."

THE BOY resembled his sister. His face showed dissipation, and he did not appear to be overjoyed at meeting Clint. Carbonate explained—

"He's been runnin' a bit wild; but his ma's been talkin' to him, and I reckon he's got a little sense in his head now."

"That isn't fair," complained young Vail, as he shook hands with Clint. "This is a lively town. I like excitement. Folks exaggerated it to my people. What's this treasure hunting business, anyway?"

There was flippancy, if not surliness, in the question. Clint was quick to resent it. He replied curtly:

"It's a very serious business. There's no play in it. If you throw in with us you'll play the game my way."

"I don't care to dip in where I'm not wanted," Vail said haughtily.

"You're not wanted unless you can play the game. Let rum alone. Buckle down and earn your share of anything we may find. Carbon and I will give you a fifth and split the rest between us."

"How much will be my share?" coldly inquired Vail.

Clint remembered the brown eyed maiden, smothered his exasperation. He said:

"That remains to be seen. It may be a wild goose chase."

"Never that," Carbonate objected.

But Clint did not offer much encouragement. He patiently explained.

"There was some gold hidden in a certain place. I don't know how much. Possibly some one has found it. We're taking you in without asking you to supply anything except a horse."

"Why?" sharply asked young Vail.

"I don't know," was the frank reply. "Must be because you're a friend of Carbonate's."

"Looks to me like some one was trying to get me away from Leadville," mused Vail sullenly.

"I'm not," honestly assured Clint. "But from what I've seen of the town, it's a good place to keep clear of unless one has business here. Carbonate, can you round up three horses and two pack animals tomorrow morning? We'll make out a list of supplies for Bert to buy. He'll pretend he's buying for his folks and will take them home. We can pull out by noon."

"Where are we going?" asked Vail, now beginning to display interest.

"I must talk with Carbonate about that, as he knows the country better than I do."

If he sensed that this answer was irrelevant and intended to forestall further queries, young Vail did not show it. He remarked casually—

"Frodsham knows this country better than any man in Colorado."

Carbonate stared at him in amazement.

"The devil!" he exclaimed. "You didn't oughter have anything to say to that skunk."

"You've got him wrong, Carbonate," said young Vail earnestly. "Dead wrong. Folks try to cheat him, and can't. Then they lie about him."

"Good land, younker! You talk crazy. Every one knows he's a downright crook."

"He's always pleasant to me and I have no reason to criticize him," defended Vail.

Clint liked him for this bit of loyalty, although marveling that he could be so blind to Frodsham's real character.

Old Carbonate said shortly:

"Well, well, Frodsham doesn't matter to us outside of trying to steal all the real estate he can. I'll round up ridin' and pack animals. Bert will buy the grub. He's goin' to sleep here so's he can be on the job. We'd better turn in soon."

Vail stepped to the door and stood for a minute, listening to the sullen roar of Chestnut Street. The raucous voice of the town was calling, and to him it sounded golden. He fought his fight, closed the door and prepared a couch of robes and blankets.

WITH the morning sun, refreshed by a full night's rest, young Vail presented a much more wholesome demeanor. His sullenness was gone, and he was boyishly keen for the great adventure. His resemblance to his sister was more striking, and Clint found his first prejudices fading. The breakfast was rather a jolly affair, and Clint was convinced that the youth was very much worth salvaging.

Working with Carbonate, Clint soon made out a list and gave it, plus a roll of money, to young Vail.

"Mum's the word, you know," he admonished.

"No one will get anything out of me," stoutly assured Vail. "I'll cart the stuff to the house and if I'm trailed, they'll think it's for my folks. Carbonate can take the horses there. I think it would be better to pull out after dark."

"By George! I really believe you have a head," said Clint.

"Chip of the old block," spoke up Carbonate, much pleased. "I'll buy the nags and leave 'em till sundown and then take them to the Vails. You better stay here, Clint, while we're marketin'."

This was agreeable to Clint, as he believed he was the man who would be trailed did he show himself on Chestnut Street. He composed himself to wait while the two were on their errands. But after they were gone, and he had finished reading the few copies of the *Reveille*, and once more had examined the *Harpers Weekly's* pictures stuck on the walls, he began to wonder whether it would not be safe and sane to visit the trading center of Chestnut Street and look in the dry goods store where Blanche Vail worked. He decided he needed handkerchiefs.

Meanwhile, young Vail, elevated in tone by the knowledge he was doing something that would please his folks, went his way to the different provision stores and made purchases of bacon, beans, coffee and the like. After finishing his purchases he stood outside a store and checked off the different items.

"How's tricks this morning, my boy?"

He jerked up his head and smiled sheepishly. It was Frodsham. The man had a resonant, mellow voice. Vail knew many people were prejudiced against Frodsham, but the real estate dealer always had been cordial and genial to him. More than once when some ruffian was inclined to be abusive, a voice from the bystanders would caution, "Kid's a friend of Frodsham."

Encompassed by this benevolent protection, he had found his greatest thrills in entering various resorts, where desperate men congregated, to test the power of Frodsham's name. Youth admires power, and Frodsham surely possessed it. As to his real estate projects, it was obvious that a big trader would be censured by the loser in a deal. Yet the courts always had absolved him when brought in on the charge of crooked practises. Young Vail did not realize that this exoneration was invariably due to perjured testimony.

"Just attending to a little business," he explained to the speculator.

A glance had told Frodsham the nature of the paper before he accosted the young man.

"Come into the Keno and have a beer," he invited.

"I can't. Been drinking too much." The confession came hard, but was made the easier by Frodsham's hearty approval.

"That's the right idea. Stick to it. I tell lots of the boys they are drinking their heads off, but they won't listen. I've wondered sometimes if you weren't over-

doing it. Of course it's none of my business, but I hate to see a promising young man slip back. But come into a restaurant and eat. If you've eaten, come in and talk while I eat."

Vail readily agreed to this and soon found himself at a corner table in The Wide West. Frodsham gave the order, and then bluntly told his companion:

"You ought to have a steady job. I believe I can place you in the office of the Pittsburg, or the Robert E. Lee. What say to trying it out after I've eaten?"

Vail was confused as to just what reply he should make.

"I'm much obliged, but I have something else to attend to first."

"So?" Frodsham's bushy brows went up, and he waited. Fidgeting a bit, Vail was constrained to give some explanation. He said—

"I expect to be away from town for a while."

"Not a long journey, I trust. We shall miss you."

"Well—really I don't know. Sort of indefinite. Depends on certain things."

Frodsham nodded as if he understood fully, and shifted the subject by saying:

"I'm misunderstood and much abused in this town, Bert. I've never knowingly wronged any man. But every crook who's tried to cheat me in a real estate deal goes around and bleats how I tried to do him. I'm fair sick of it all. I'm hungry for a decent place where I can drop in and forget it for a bit. I'd like to meet your folks."

"I'll have you up to meet the folks just as soon as I get back."

FRODSHAM beamed on him, chuckled and said:

"Now don't get mad, but I've seen a young woman in this town who's a dead ringer for you. Now, now, you're not to get mad."

Vail laughed heartily, highly amused.

"One young lady in town should resemble me. I'll bet it's my sister, Blanche, you've seen. Works in a dry goods store. She's older than I, but sometimes folks think we're twins."

"There! Doesn't that beat the Dutch! I remember now it was in a store I saw her. Bert, you never will understand how lonely a man can be, even in a crowd, until you find yourself without any folks. I have money enough. I don't need nor want any more. But what is there for me to do? Gamble and drink myself to death? Faugh! I'm fair sick of the whole business. Do you know it's nearly a year since I've known the luxury of visiting in a real home? And if there's any more lonesome spot than a hotel, then I don't want to see it. If I could drop my business and strike off into the mountains I'd be as happy as a kid. I envy you—young, with the world before you. Full of vim and vigor, and free to range where you will. That reminds me; if you're going where you may need a gun I want to make you a present of a beauty."

"I'm grateful for the offer, Mr. Frodsham, but I think we have a full supply of guns. As to calling at the house I'll take you there as soon as we get back."

"Fine. Hope you have a bully trip and find a very rich mine."

"Well, it isn't exactly a mine we're after. In fact, I don't just know what it will turn out to be. I'm going it sort of blind. I wish I could explain more, but it isn't my secret."

"That's right. Never spill another man's talk. Even the poorest of us can have the reputation of keeping our mouths closed. I only hope you're going in safe company."

"Oh, both of them are all right," assured Vail. "Now I think I'll be trotting along. As soon as I return, remember, you shall meet the folks."

"And the lady who looks enough like you to be your twin," laughingly added Frodsham."

"Certainly. Blanche is always at home nights." They shook hands and young Vail returned to the street.

CLINT, owner of several dozen new handkerchiefs, returned to the cabin and seated himself out front and pondered. His meeting with Blanche Vail had been all that a normal man could wish. It was always rush hour in the store, but he had exchanged quite a few words with her. He had received her hurried appreciation of his taking her brother from town, and her warm invitation to call at the house when he returned. The interview should have elated him and sent him forth with a singing heart. Yet he brooded, staring at the ground.

Old Carbonate approached within a dozen feet of him before he jerked up his head and mechanically dropped a hand to his hip. The old man reported:

"Nags bought and paid for. I'm to call for 'em at sundown at Pressly's, and take 'em to Vail's house. Any one been here since I was gone?"

"I don't know. I slipped downtown and bought a few things I needed. Listen, Carbonate, I believe we must be very sly in slipping away from Leadville. I saw Bert in a restaurant, talking with Frodsham. That crook wouldn't have much trouble in pumping the kid."

Old Carbonate sat down on the ground, fanned his face and stared helplessly.

"That boy wouldn't ever cold deck us," he insisted hoarsely. "He's been a young fool, wild and willful. But he couldn't be a Vail and be a snake."

"I never thought anything like that. But he believes this Frodsham is a much abused man. You remember his talk last night? Today Frodsham has him at the table. He wasn't eating, but just keeping Frodsham company. He would have to give some explanation for being in town so early. He wouldn't need to tell more than a word or two for that rascal to know something was up."

"Prob'ly never said a word that would give us away," said Carbonate.

"Possibly not. He wouldn't do it on purpose. But I can't take even the shadow of a chance. We must change our plans. You and the boy leave tonight over the stage road. Keep to the brush till beyond the end of Chestnut Street before taking the road. Ten miles down the road cross the ridge. That will fetch you close to Twin Lakes. Make your camp on the west wide of the Arkansas. I'll cross over the ridge up here and go down the valley, and find you between the river and the lakes. Tell the boy nothing, except I'm held back a bit by some business."

The old man remained silent for a few moments, and then complained—

"But if we're watched we'll be dogged from the time we start."

"I'll be the red herring drawn across the trail," explained Clint. "This evening I'll be on the street, visiting different places. That'll give you time to clear out."

"What good will it do us if you're potted from behind? I heard talk about you punching somebody last night. That crowd is out to take your hair."

Clint shook his head.

"Frodsham will pass word I'm very precious and mustn't be annoyed. That is, if he got anything out of the kid. But if any one picks a fuss with me I'll know the gang suspects nothing. I'll beat a retreat and ride after you."

"If he had Bert in the restaurant, just for company, he prob'ly pumped him a trifle. But Bert never would give us away a-purpose."

"I'm convinced of that. But that's how the game lays. I can tell after entering the first gambling hell if it's hands off, or if they are out to get me. If they're on a scalp path I'll prove to them they want none of my gunplay. If they're hostile I'll bust loose and chase after you down the stage road tonight. If they don't notice me I'll know they're ready to follow me, and I'll cross up here and lose them, and then ride down the valley and pick you up. Here comes the kid. He mustn't suspect anything."

Young Vail was in high spirits. He had left a mother, who rejoiced because he was leaving the temptations of Leadville behind him. He had called at the mine and had said goodby to his father. It was

much to read the pleasure in his father's face. He would go to the store and see his sister when she would be taking time off to eat her lunch at the back of the store. He was finding it to be very pleasant, this rehabilitation as a son and brother. And there was the urge, which fires the blood of every healthy mortal, the quest for hidden treasure. The final plans for a secret departure were made while Vail was calling on his sister. Clint roughly sketched the two routes to be taken, one down the stage road, and one west of the ridge and down the narrow valley of the Upper Arkansas. Old Carbonate, familiar with every foot of the country, said:

"I'll leave your hoss at Pressly's stable, lower end of Chestnut Street. You can pound after us if you find it safe. If you see you're to be followed, cut across Chestnut and into the sage and make towards Vail's place before crossing the ridge. If they chase you, it's up to you to fool 'em and throw 'em off the trail."

FOR THE remainder of the afternoon Clint played solitaire and his friend slept. Young Vail's delay in returning worried Clint tremendously. When the young man came in he looked rather sober. He explained:

"Went back to see mother again. If I get any money out of this I'll buy land far out. Father says this town will spread all over creation."

"Right, son. You can't lose if you do that. I'll throw in with you. We can pick up lots at twenty-five dollars apiece. Saw your sister, of course? Found the town humming, as usual? Carbonate's waking up. We'll have time for supper before we pull out. You'll have a chance to say goodby to your folks once more."

Carbonate came to his feet and glanced at the sun, sliced in half by the western ridge. It was darkening rapidly when they sat down to eat. The stars were so many planets in brilliancy when Clint said casually:

"You two go ahead and be packing. I have an errand to do in town. Pull out as soon as you can. I'll overtake you."

The old man followed him to the door and whispered—

"No pickin' fights."

"Nary a one," assured Clint. "I'm a man of peace this night."

He took a course through the sage that permitted him to emerge on the noisy thoroughfare close to the saloon where he had had his fight with Bill Cain. When he entered the big room he saw the familiar red shirt at the bar. Knifer was quick to discover him, and nudged Cain and whispered something. Cain started as if to wheel about, but checked himself. On Cain's right was a slim, dapper man, who looked to be more of the East than the West. The figure and the fine clothes were familiar. Clint shifted his position until he could see his profile, and recognized him as Jasper Jim of Taos, a dandy in dress, and a gambler and killer by instinct.

He was being ignored; a bad sign. He walked to the bar and ordered a beer. He drank slowly and watched the room in the mirror. He saw Frodsham enter, walking with short, quick steps, his eyes searching for some one. On beholding the red shirt he advanced to Knifer and said something over his shoulder. Without turning his head Knifer made some reply. Clint knew Frodsham had been told of his presence and that the announcement was a surprise. Frodsham walked to the card room, followed by the three men.

Clint was satisfied that the chase was on. He lighted a cigar and took to the street. Turning up his coat collar and pulling his hat low over his eyes, he watched through a window. His departure seemed to be a signal for the four men to emerge from the back room. Frodsham spoke to a huge fellow at the lower end of the bar, who bolted his drink and trailed after the four. Two feet from the door Frodsham halted and talked rapidly, and then turned back. Clint darted between the buildings and crouched low in the darkness. He caught a glimpse of

Knifer's red shirt as the four men turned up the street.

He took the street and quickly lost himself in the crowd. He was the one for whom the four men were searching. If the boy unwittingly had betrayed the secret, Frodsham would know who was the key man in the enterprise. It was slow work making headway. Squads of miners were crossing and recrossing the street, moving in solid wedges as a matter of self-defense against thugs and thieves.

At last the crowd began to thin out. He was on the outskirts of the town. He found Pressly's stable. His horse was saddled and waiting. He mounted and galloped into the sage, taking a path that would lead him back toward the Vail house, but not to it. Halfway along the path he swung to the left and into a trail that led across the ten thousand foot ridge.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLANCHE

THE THREE searchers paused before the barrier at the rear of the small cave. Fragments of rocks and the remnants of a blanket filled the mouth of a second recess. Old Carbonate called a halt, although his eyes glistened with impatience and expectancy.

"I feel like some one was watching us," he whispered.

He retreated to the mouth of the cave and found the narrow trail clear of all life. La Plata Peak towered some fourteen thousand feet above him, a terrific monument to mark the crimes of thieves and murderers. The buttresses of the mountain were far flung and almost reached the two silver buttons known as Twin Lakes. To the east was the silver ribbon of the Upper Arkansas, rich in trapper lore long before the precious metals were dreamed of in this thousand mile wide backbone of the continent.

Picking away at the rubble, young Vail said—

"Clint, you fetched us here as if you'd made the journey many times."

"A dying man told me the route and gave me a rough map. The small piles of stones along the way have not been disturbed. We only had to follow them until they ended, and then retrace our way by six of them, the seventh marking the opening of this shallow cave— Do you see anything, Carbonate?"

"Sun hit something that glittered."

"A bare rock, or a patch of mica."

"Prob'ly." The old man turned back and asked, "Why don't we be forward with it?"

"Perhaps we'd better bring up the pack animals first," said Clint. "We must be ready to pull out sharp once we've found it."

"What if there isn't anything in there?" asked Vail, and there was a shiver in his low voice.

"I'm gambling there is," said Clint. "What say to fetching up the burros, Carbonate?"

"I'll go after them. Just saw that glitterin' again."

"Some naked ledge. Stay and watch us open this hole and then go for them."

"No. I'd rather fetch the burros and then see what we've found. Just like a boy Christmas mornin', honin' to peek into the stockin', but puttin' it off for a bit."

"Mayn't be anything there," muttered Vail.

"Hi, younker. We're sure of our medicine. Why make it mad by seemin' to doubt it? I'm off."

"Superstitious as an old mountain man," said Clint, after Carbonate had torn himself away from the tantalizing spot to hurry down the trail. "Well, here goes the last door to our treasure house."

He pawed the rubbish behind him and Vail threw it out on the ledge.

"We've arrived," whispered Clint softly. "Hand me a candle and a match."

Vail did as requested, then stood behind him and laughed nervously. He asked—

"What do you see?"

Clint made inarticulate noises in his throat and tossed a human skull back of him. Young Vail gave ground, his eyes blinking rapidly.

"Here's another. Don't get nervous. Seems to be several of them," mumbled Clint.

Holding the candle in one hand, he threw back of him seven skulls in all. Then he slowly walked out into the sunlight and stared bleakly at his companion.

"What's the matter?" The query was whispered.

"We've been sold," bitterly announced Clint. "There's nothing in there. Just a pocket of skulls. What crazy fancy caused any one to do that? Why should a dying man, whom I'd tried to help, play me such a trick? Take the candle and look for yourself."

Vail did as he was bid. The pocket in the rock was scarcely larger than a bushel basket. It was bare of any treasure. Emerging, he blew out the candle and laughed hysterically.

"How can we divide them?" he asked, still the victim of nervous humor. "There are seven, and I was to have a fifth."

"It's amazing," muttered Clint, staring in disgust at the grinning remnants of mortality. "I don't understand it."

He picked up a skull and shook loose dirt from it. He became argumentative, as if endeavoring to establish a case.

"There was the wounded man I packed into Taos after villains had left him to die. I found a doctor of sorts and stayed with him. The man knew he must cash in. He seemed to be grateful for what I had done. He told me the yarn about treasure, described the place and gave me his rough map. Why should a dying man turn humorist and play me such a trick?"

Young Vail was much impressed.

"He wouldn't ever do it!" he said. "Give me that candle. I'm going to search more closely."

WITH the candle lighted, he picked up a long knife and returned to the small pocket and began stabbing the sides and bottom. Finally he returned to the mouth of the cave and threw down the knife.

"He probably told the truth, Clint, but some one got ahead of us. I dug down into the dirt until I struck ledge. I believe the man was honest. We're just unlucky, that's all. And, Clint, I'm just as much obliged for being taken into the partnership as if we had found a million."

"I believe you, Bert," said Clint dully. "If I have to think that fellow was fooling me, then I'll lose faith in human nature. He wasn't much good as a man. He was a pretty bad character and went with his kind. One of them did for him. For stealing and hiding the loot, probably. But I did my best to save him without any thought of pay— I hear the burros. Hope Carbonate won't take it hard."

"Why should he? He hasn't lost anything. You paid all expenses, and you didn't have to take us in."

"I owed Carbonate a good turn."

"You didn't owe me anything."

"I think I did. I think it would have been wrong to have passed you by when I had a chance to take you out of your rotten way of living and, perhaps, keep you from spoiling the lives of your parents—and sister. But that's all past. The sure thing hasn't panned out. Borrasca instead of bonanza. Now we'll get back to town."

"What'll you do back in town?"

"Same's I've always done. Make a living."

Vail said nothing.

THE SKULLS grinned derisively. Clint seemed to feel he was due to speak more to the point, inasmuch as he had posed as something of a moralist. He explained:

"I don't intend to spend my life at the tables. I'll find some real work."

"Well," said Vail philosophically, "I'd

say we'd just started. Here we are with a good outfit, beans, bacon and other fixings. Why not go hunting for a mine?"

Before Clint could answer, Old Carbonate and the two burros came around a granite elbow in the trail. In a raucous voice he cried—

"Fetch on your gold!"

As an echo a deeper voice up the slope loudly bawled—

"Stick 'em up!"

The three stared in amazement at the barrel of a rifle slithering over the top of a boulder.

"Put 'em up!" bellowed another voice at the bend in the trail; and behind Carbonate appeared another grim visage cuddled against the butt of a rifle.

"Stand just as you are!" warned a man down the slope and in line with the mouth of the cave. Mechanically the three partners put up their hands.

"All right, Jim. Go in and clean 'em," called the man above the cave.

Jasper Jim of Taos, immaculate after the fashion of the Border dandy, came around the bend, a drawn gun in his left hand, his narrow gray eyes as feral as those of a cornered rattlesnake. He halted by the burros and ordered:

"This way, old man. Step lively. My trigger finger's itching."

With a groan Old Carbonate walked toward the killer. Jasper Jim was an adept at disarming one caught at a disadvantage. Quickly finishing with Carbonate, he directed:

"Go to the mouth of that cave and squat. You, Clint, come along. We've met before. I know all about you and your treasure hunting."

Clint grinned sardonically. After all an empty treasure hole had its compensations. He advanced promptly and was relieved of his gun.

"Find it funny, huh?" murmured Jasper Jim, his eyes slowly widening. "As I'm sure you'n your friends won't ever tell, I'll let you into a little secret. The scut you tried to doctor in Taos died along of my lead after refusing to tell about this little secret hiding place. You *sabe?* See the joke? I've trailed you ever since, waiting for you to lead me to it. Go back and squat beside the old man."

"How far are you going to carry this thing?" demanded Clint.

"Git back there and squat! How far did I carry it in Taos with t'other chap? Here, boy. Your turn. Come along."

The youth was quickly disarmed and took his place beside his friends. He feared the catastrophe had addled Old Carbonate's mind, for the latter was contemplating the grinning skulls and chuckling. Bill Cain, Knifer and Big Brace came from their stations and stood with Jasper Jim.

"What's all these deathheads mean?" savagely demanded Brace.

"It's the treasure we came after. Now you folks have them," said Clint.

"You sneaking liar!" growled Jasper Jim. "Get into that hole, Knifer, and toss out the loot."

"Happy days, Knifer," encouraged Clint.

"Happy graves when we git round to it," the ruffian replied.

"Old man's gone plumb crazy," Big Brace told Jasper Jim.

Carbonate's friends feared this, for he was now laughing until tears streamed from his ancient eyes.

Clint whispered to young Vail:

"Say nothing. I'll do the talking. Just one slim chance to eucher this bunch."

"Clint, you keep that mouth of yours shut, or I'll bore you," warned Jasper Jim.

A loud howl from the cave startled outlaws and prisoners. Knifer came out on all fours, like a gigantic monkey, his eyes wild and his mouth agape.

"What's the matter with the fool?" cried Jasper Jim.

"There ain't nothin' in there!" yelled Knifer.

The four outlaws roared oaths and threats. Clint smiled and winked at Vail. Old Carbonate ceased his laughter and glanced curiously at Clint. Jasper Jim advanced, walking on tiptoe, his long gun thrust forward.

HE RESTED the muzzle of the weapon between Clint's eyes and barked:

"Out with it? Where did you hide it? Speak, or I'll shoot."

"Shoot and be damned, and then try to find it."

"Huh! Maybe the kid'll be more free to talk."

"You harm any one of us and the secret's gone forever," stoutly warned Clint.

"Cain, take that candle an' light it and go in there and see what you can find," ordered Jasper Jim.

Cain did as bid, and inside of two minutes was back to report—

"Clean's a hound's tooth."

Jasper squatted on his heels and glanced at the skulls. With his left hand he examined them, as if expecting to see double eagles rattle out. He told his companions:

"This is the place. The gold was hidden here and the skulls were left to scare away any prowling Injuns. There was between seventy-five and a hundred thousand dollars, most of it in hard money and the rest in nuggets. The Espinosas didn't care for gold, just wanted to kill. We, who trailed after and with them, did care for it. We're going to get that stuff if we have to burn these fellows by inches."

"Then start and end with me," said Clint. "The youngster doesn't know where it is as I moved it while he was up the slope pacing off a line that would cross the mouth of this cave at right angles. Carbonate was down the trail after the burros."

"Going to cheat 'em, huh?" snarled Jasper Jim, still skeptical.

"No. Going to hide the gold against your coming. The sunlight shone on the barrels of your guns and gave you away."

Old Carbonate started convulsively. Addressing the other three men, Clint said:

"You other fellows will spoil your own breakfast if you let this imitation man killer from Taos kick over the kettle. This is something to be talked about without any threats, or hooting. If we can make a bargain, sure proof, we'll swap the gold."

"Tell us now and take your hosses an' skedaddle," cried Knifer.

Clint laughed in genuine amusement. Old Carbonate, still staring at the skulls, resumed his laughter. Young Vail's eyes distended. Clint had never sent him up the slope. Then he got his cue and became blank of face.

Bill Cain suggested—

"If they'll make a bargain we'll meet 'em more'n halfway, Jasper."

THE TAOS man nodded sullenly, although the glint in his hooded eyes gave the lie to his sincerity. He slowly replied:

"We'll bargain, maybe. But we'll do a little looking around first. By his own tell, if he ain't lying, he hasn't had time to wander far. There was nigh to four hundred pounds of gold to be hid. He didn't carry that far. You three fellers lie down. Cain, Knife and Brace, tie 'em up. I'll belt the man who makes any fight over the head with my gun."

He took a position behind the prisoners, his heavy gun raised for a blow, while his companions quickly tied the trio's ankles and then secured their hands behind their backs.

"Now drag them into the cave," ordered Jasper Jim.

After their captors withdrew the prisoners could hear the men scrambling about among the boulders. Old Carbonate groaned then, peculiarly enough, began his snickering laugh.

"Don't!" hoarsely begged Clint. "Keep your head."

"Oh, Lawdy! It'll be the death of me if I hold in much longer," whispered Carbonate.

"What's the matter with you?" fiercely asked Vail.

"Oh, never mind! Just my ways."

"Carbonate," whispered Clint. "We found nothing. I've been running a bluff on them."

For a few moments the old man was quiet, and then he broke out afresh.

"I don't care. It's funny any way I look at it. What you tryin' to do, Clint?"

"To work loose from these cursed ropes," panted Clint. "Some brush waddie must have tied them."

But neither of the three could make any impression on the bonds. Suddenly young Vail commenced pushing himself over the rough floor, much like an inchworm.

"What are you up to, younker?" whispered Carbonate.

"Can't talk. Just an off chance," panted the youth. "I see a knife!"

No one of them wondered how the knife got there—half buried in the earth. They accepted the fact, gladly, without question.

With a tremendous effort Vail sent his head over the rim of the hole and rolled over on his face. He swept his head back and forth, gradually working forward until his lips touched the loose dirt; and soon he had the handle of the knife between his teeth. The return was even more arduous. Gripping the knife, he turned on his back and reversed his style of locomotion by hitching along with his shoulders.

With a final effort Vail dropped the knife beside Clint and huskily whispered:

"The knife. Turn your back to me. Get a grip on it. I'll back up so you can get at my hands."

Clint, lying on his side, soon had the haft of the knife half wedged, half gripped by his fingers. He could not do much more. Vail pressed back until the point of the blade was under his cords. He directed Clint to work the knife back and forth. He felt the blade bite, but he also felt the rope giving.

"Stop!" he whispered.

His free hands snatched the knife and severed Clint's bonds. Old Carbonate was as quickly released. The latter drew a deep breath and asked:

"What next? Make a rush down the slope?"

"Lie down as you were. Put the ropes over your legs. Your hands out of sight. I'll keep the knife. If more than one man comes to us the game may be up."

"Anyway it's heartenin' to hear them a-workin' and a-cussin'," whispered Carbonate.

Just then the searchers began an exchange of angry talk. Knifer insisted on immediate torture. Bill Cain wished to be master of ceremonies. Jasper Jim said:

"Just remember I'm boss of this outfit. That's what I was called in for. The big chief knows I have brains. Knifer, go and drag Clint out here."

THE THREE men on the cave floor stiffened in expectancy.

"He mustn't cry out," whispered Clint.

Knifer, his eyes blurred by the sunlight, entered the cave and dropped on his knees between Clint and young Vail.

"Which of you is Mr. Clint?" Knifer asked as his hands groped in the semi-darkness.

"Right under your hands, Knifer. What's the next card?"

"You're goin' out into th' sunshine."

"Good. Stand me on my feet and cut the ropes."

"No time for such perliteness. Orders is to drag you out, an' draggin' is what I'm goin' to do."

He bent down, and instantly a hand was clutching his throat and the point of the knife was pricking his neck. Old Carbonate stripped the belt of gun and knife. The prisoner was quickly tied. Clint, in a whisper, said:

"Ask for Brace to come in here. If the trick's discovered you'll be the first to go over the ridge."

Knifer called out:

"Brace, lend a hand for a jiffy. Got to carry this cuss out."

"Drag him out," yelled Jasper Jim.

But Brace, nearest the cave, came to the opening and complained:

"Can't see nothing. Where be you?"

A prick of the knife gave Knifer his cue.

"Here," he answered huskily.

"Don't step on me, you big calf," warned Clint.

"I'll smash your damn' face," growled Brace, as he felt his way to the group. "Jasper said to drag him out. Draggin's too good—"

The barrel of the big gun struck his head and he collapsed. His weapons were removed and he was bound and placed beside Knifer. Clint, now armed with the two captured guns, told his companions:

"This is my fight. I'm going out. Stick here."

"What the devil you two fools waiting for?" cried out Jasper Jim. "Where's Clint?"

"Coming!"

And Clint jumped from the cave, a gun in each hand.

Bill Cain was petrified with amazement for a second, but Jasper Jim reacted instantly. His gun leaped from its holster and boomed heavily, the bullet hitting a ledge and ricocheting with a scream. Clint fired an instant later, and Jasper Jim was finished with treasure hunting. With a slightly puzzled expression on his thin face, he swayed for a moment and then fell on his face.

Bill Cain yelled and commenced shooting, his first bullet catching Clint in the shoulder and turning him half around. A shot from Clint's right hand gun dropped him beside Jasper Jim. But the battle was not yet won. From the cave rolled the form of Old Carbonate, quickly followed by the bounding figure of young Vail. Then Big Brace, the cause of this eruption, burst into view, a huge rock in one hand and a captured knife in the other. Clint had left him securely tied, he had believed, and now the man was attacking. The rock caught Clint in the side and crumpled him to the ground. With the yell of a madman Brace leaped forward to finish him with the knife, and was neatly shot off his feet. Vail and Carbonate came running forward, the former crying:

"You're killed? Badly hurt?"

"Broken shoulder. Some ribs busted. Find these men's horses and load them on. We'll take them down to the stage road. Then fetch out Knifer."

The two ran to round up the horses, somewhere down the trail. Clint made a sling for his left arm and was pressing a hand over the stabbing pain in his side when Knifer darted from the cave and turned at right angles to scramble up among the rocks.

Clint yelled after his mates:

"Knifer's loose, making for a rifle. Keep under cover!"

CLINT endeavored to get a shot at the man, but the boulders were too sheltering. Snatching up Cain's gun, he shifted his position and watched for the desperado to show himself. He saw the rifle barrel as the sun picked it out and touched it with silver. Under cover of the ledge he crawled past the cave, and again reconnoitered the slope. Knifer fired, but at something down the trail, on the other side of the elbow of rock. Clint heard Old Carbonate shriek a warning to young Vail. He so feared for the youngster's safety that he betrayed his own position. Knifer jumped to the top of a boulder and brought the rifle to his shoulder. He fired hastily and missed by an inch. Clint fired rapidly, emptying one gun. Knifer swayed and stubbornly essayed to cock his piece, and concluded by diving headforemost from the rock.

Old Carbonate and young Vail came panting around the jutting rock. Clint grinned and said:

"Never mind toting them to the stage road. Bury them in the cave. Game's ended."

"Not in the cave!" remonstrated Old Carbonate. "Down the slope somewheres. Be you badly hurt? Let me look you over."

"Same old busted shoulder. Same old busted ribs. That's all."

And for the first time in his life Clint fainted.

The return to Leadville was all a bad dream to Clint. He ached and burned.

He heard the roar of Chestnut Street as his friends hurried him along, parallel to it. He believed he was being taken to Carbonate's shack until he heard a familiar voice saying:

"What a shame! What a pity! Yes, yes, fetch him in. Put him to bed. But only the Lord knows what Minnie'll say when she finds we have a extra mouth to feed."

Clint was conscious of some confusion, of a long Prince Albert coat being rapidly rotated, then Mrs. Vail was mothering him, and the girl was reaching across the bed to hold his hand.

They kept him in bed three days, and then he insisted on getting up. It was evening when he dressed and stepped into the living room. Mrs. Vail noted his searching gaze, and explained:

"Blanche is in the front room. She'll want you to come in."

He passed into the front room and found the girl standing, her hand on the hall door. Seated in a corner was Frodsham.

"I'm inviting him to go," said the girl.

"I came here to find out why this man took your brother on a wild goose chase," said Frodsham.

"Not a wild goose chase entirely. We found four of your friends up the slope, and they are sleeping there now. Take your hat and go."

"You'll pay!" warned Frodsham.

"Father says he's jumped your claim," broke in the girl.

"He did it for practise. His men won't be there when I call in the morning. If they are I shall call on him."

Frodsham quickly took his departure. Alone with the girl, Clint felt very awkward. He began by accusing himself, saying:

"I'm sorry it didn't pan out better. Sorry for Bert. But he behaved splendidly. If we hadn't been jumped we'd kept on prospecting until we found something. After my shoulder's all right—"

"You call your trip a failure?" she inquired.

"If we leave out the passing of four scoundrels, yes, Miss Blanche."

She laughed and laughed. He stared at her in bewilderment. Then she managed to explain—

"Didn't you know my brother is fifth owner in a very rich mine?"

He shook his head dumbly.

"Old Carbonate found pay dirt in that horrible cave. Heavy with silver carbonate. I intended to wait and let him tell you. Seems he noticed the dirt that was dug up by a knife while you were being made prisoners. Said he nearly gave it away by laughing. Some Eastern men are waiting for you to get well and go up there. They've almost offered quarter of a million just on the samples Carbonate brought home."

Clint heard this in amazement. When his wits had cleared he bowed his head and said:

"A million is my price. We'll stick to it. I'll name it after my wife."

"Oh! Your wife."

"My wife to be, I hope. I'll call it 'The Blanche.' You approve?"

"I approve of everything you will do in the future", she hurriedly replied. "You —you scared me when you spoke of— your wife."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers writers and adventurers

"Secret Service"
(*Conclusion*)

THE Intelligence Unit of the Bureau of Internal Revenue maintains a group of special agents, located in important cities under the direction of special agents in charge, who investigate alleged serious infractions of departmental regulations and alleged criminal offenses of Revenue employes. An example of such alleged criminality is the charge that a Revenue employe has solicited or accepted a bribe. These special agents also investigate alleged attempts by taxpayers fraudulently to evade their income taxes and other Federal taxes.

Although one of the most recently organized Federal investigative activities, having been in existence less than a decade, the Internal Revenue Intelligence Unit has established a most creditable record. Its first and present chief is Elmer L. Irey. Mr. Irey and many of his agents received their training in the Division of Post Office Inspectors.

It is possible for an outsider to receive an appointment as a special agent in the Internal Revenue Intelligence Unit. The examination is conducted under Civil Service auspices, as outlined for Secret Service operatives, and application should be made to the Civil Service Commission as already set forth.

Field officers of the Income-Tax Unit are known as revenue agents. They make the investigations of income-tax returns where no fraud is involved. These positions are filled as the result of Civil Service examinations, but a high degree of proficiency in Accounting is a necessary prerequisite. Revenue agents are scat-

tered all over the United States. They operate under Revenue Agents in Charge located in important cities.

The Coast Guard Service was created as presently constituted on January 28, 1915, by combining the Revenue Cutter and Life Saving Service of the Treasury. The Revenue Cutter Service was first organized on August 4, 1790, to combat smuggling. The Life Saving Service was created on June 20, 1874. The original activities of the Revenue Cutter Service were not investigative but preventive. The early practice was for revenue cutters to overhaul a ship, after which revenue officers would board her and search for contraband merchandise.

While the Revenue Cutter Service is older than the Division of Post Office Inspectors, it can not claim to be the oldest investigative agency of the Government. It was only after the consolidation of the two older services to form the Coast Guard Service that investigative activities began to form a prominent part in the daily schedule of the new service. In cooperation with the Bureau of Prohibition and with the Special Agency Service of the Bureau of Customs, investigations are made to detect and apprehend liquor smugglers. The Coast Guard also cooperates with Customs special agents to detect and apprehend smugglers of narcotics and other contraband merchandise.

The Revenue Cutter Service is military in character, being patterned after the Navy. Its personnel consists of officers and enlisted men. (There are, of course, civilian clerks in the Washington headquarters office.) Information as to how to enter the Coast Guard may be obtained from the Commandant, Coast Guard Service, Washington, D. C.

The Bureau of Immigration is charged with the enforcement of the Immigration and Chinese-Exclusion laws. A number of immigrant inspectors are employed in this work under the supervision of Commissioners of Immigration of Immigrant Inspectors in Charge at the principal ports of entry. Inspectors meet every incoming vessel from foreign countries. Immigrant inspectors are also stationed along the Canadian and Mexican borders. Very often the "undercover" investigations of immigrant inspectors are played up in fiction as "secret-service" exploits.

In order to obtain an appointment as immigrant inspector, the applicant must have a thorough knowledge of the Immigration and Chinese-Exclusion laws. The examination, which is given by the Civil Service, is along the lines already indicated.

The functions of the Bureau of Prohibition are so well known that comment is hardly necessary. There are Prohibition inspectors, Prohibition agents, and Prohibition investigators. The inspectors make investigations of applicants desiring alcohol permits and see that these persons obey the law after being granted permits. The agents make routine investigations of ordinary violations of the Prohibition law and act as raiding officers. They take the place of the old-time Revenue officers. Prohibition investigators make investigations of the more complicated and involved cases.

In addition to these officers, there is a corps of special agents, operating directly out of Washington, in contrast with the other field officers, who are under the supervision of administrators or deputy administrators. The special agents, under the supervision of special agents in charge, investigate charges against the other Prohibition officers. They also investigate the larger and more important violations of the Prohibition law.

An important part of the Bureau of Prohibition is the Narcotic Division, under the supervision of Colonel L. S. Nutt, Deputy Commissioner. Narcotic agents combat the traffic in opium and cocaine and the derivatives of these drugs. Frequently the exploits of these agents rival the most thrilling fiction.

Appointments to the Bureau of Prohibition are made as the result of Civil Service examinations conducted along the lines already indicated. Pharmacists

stand a good chance of appointment as Prohibition investigators or narcotic agents.

Activities in the other investigative branches of the Government are more or less specialized, requiring a technical knowledge of the work of the particular establishment in addition to investigative talent and experience. Therefore, outsiders stand very little chance of being appointed in these branches.

I trust you will pardon me for inflicting this letter upon you. My only thought in writing it is to be of some slight service to *Adventure*, which I enjoy reading very much. If at any time you feel that I may be of assistance in answering inquiries from other *Adventure* "fans" relative to the investigative activities of Uncle Sam, I shall be only too glad to do my bit in return for the many hours of solid enjoyment *Adventure* has given me.

Several years ago, while still in the Government service, I tried to find some authoritative work on the history of the investigative activities carried on by the Federal Government. When to my surprise, I found no such work, I began to do a lot of research, in consequence of which I have accumulated quite a lot of material on the subject, which I shall be glad to share with any other interested *Adventure* reader. Sincerely yours—JOHN B. MURPHY.

Australian Lingo

THOUGH this letter was signed only with initials, the information contained seems interesting enough to merit publication.

I beg leave to join in the "corroboree" regarding Australian cockneyism, and plead "not guilty" to the charge.

I am Australian born, living all my life here, and the only talk I have heard like that quoted by Comrade Teall has emanated from Pommies (slang for English immigrants). I will say however that our talk is sometimes puzzling to new comers because of the sprinkling of aboriginal words (such as budgeree, cobber, tucker, yakkahumpy, etc.) in our daily speech.

I'll also admit we are careless in our speech, and we *do* drop our aitches; but we *don't* pick 'em up as the dinkum Londoners do!

The Australian "standard accent" is famous. A man from Kalgoorlie pronounces his words in exactly the same manner and tone as a man from Coolangatke on the other side of the continent.

We also have a "Slanguage"; and such professors as "bullockies" and shearers would make an American mule-skinner blush.

I'm sorry to say we are very proud; and the mere fact of being an Australian is apt to make us consider ourselves the "elect of God."

Yanks are welcome here unless they tell us who won the war; then they think they've been struck by a willy-willy.—P. O'M., Coogee, Australia.

La Longue Traverse

De ice, she's froze on Lac du Bois;
De col' nort' win', she's blow;
Batees an' moi, up in dose wood
It's tam dat we mus' go;
So it's tea, smok' feesh, smok' feesh an' tea
'An mebbe dose get scarce!
You don' get fat w'en you ten' dose trap
Up Nort' on La Longue Traverse!

Up dere, she's col' lak Meestair' Death;
Up dere, dat loupgarou
She's howl at night by dose Nordern Light
Wan ghos'ly "Oo-loo-looh!"
Up dere we's fin' dose seelvair fox
Dat mek us *hommes d'affaires*—
Eef *mal raquette* don' get us firs'—
Up Nort' on La Longue Traverse!

De sled, she's carry traps an' gun,
Some blanket, feesh an' tea;
She's tote Batees, w'en he's tired to run—
Bimeby, she's carry me!
Dose huskie dogs, deir *bow-wow-wow!*
Soun' gaiment thoo dose airs—
So it's "Mush! Au 'voir!" Come back some more
W'en's done La Longue Traverse!

—HAROLD WILLARD GLEASON.

Ralph Hubert Johnston

"THE RED ARROW", appearing in this issue, is Mr. Johnston's first *Adventure* tale. He arises to give comrades around the fire, a word about himself.

Your request for a few words about myself for your "Camp-Fire" is at hand. Usually I find myself an interesting subject to inflict on unwilling listeners—but to be asked to talk about myself is so surprising as to nearly inhibit my flow of language—almost. I'll do my best.

In the way of pure autobiographic statistics there are the following: I was born some twenty-

six years ago at Pocatello, Idaho. (Probably Pocatello would be surprised to learn it.) My education, which has been fragmentary, officially, but continuous unofficially, was received, the official part, in the same place. During about one-fifth of the twenty-six years I have been hammering this typewriter off and on, to the be-devilment of various editors. My grandparents came across the plains with a train of Mormons a good many years ago.

(I should like to seize this opportunity to state that the Mormons do not wear horns any more. Even among what might be termed fundamentalists living in the more remote sections of Utah it is very rare now.)

And so I am fairly well acquainted with the atmosphere of the West. I have sat on the top-rail more than once and inspected some Red Arrow. It is a sorry thing that his kind are regarded as pests on the range now. Economics play hob with romance.

I have known a number of cowpunchers. There are only a few of the old incorrigibles who persist in sleeping without removing boots and spurs and chaps. The majority of them take a bath occasionally and otherwise behave practically the same as normal folks. It was my boyhood ambition to be one. But cowpunching has its unromantic side. Saddle galls and sage ticks and——

But this is supposed to be about me. Let me see. I am white, unmarried, of Scotch-English descent and belong to no church. I might add that I have an advanced case of chronic literary aspirations. There has never been any cure found for this trouble.

By now I am certain the readers have had enough of me, so with the hope that my letter will not be taken seriously and my story will give pleasure, I close.—RALPH HUBERT JOHNSTON.

The Palm Fronds Whisper—

AND BEFORE a glowing camp-fire, built from the cherished driftwood of memories, two genuine adventurers light their pipes and travel back over the miles and years between; again they are boys, youths, two-fisted men . . . and the white sands sparkle in the moonlight . . .

I shouldn't write another letter so soon but I can't help it. It shows again how small the world is. I can see plainly in my mind's eye Paul Neumann Senior going down the wharf at Sans Souci, beyond Waikiki, Honolulu suburbs; sitting down to take off his wooden leg and then swimming and floating in the lagoon. I knew him well, knew his wife, met Robert Louis Stevenson when he lived in one of the cottages there and used to tootle melancholy tunes on his flute to a favorite poem of his, "Say, can that boy be I?"

I met him first with Frank Unger, known as "Towsey Mongalay" to his close friends, and Harry Gillig. But I didn't have the luck to meet Paul Junior then. I just read his story, "Kaliho," with its true color and tragic force.

I am almost inclined to challenge his statement that he has roamed more of the Lower Pacific and come back to civilization. I had seven years of it, outside of my Hawaiian years, trying to make a fortune out of copra and shell and having a whale of a time.

I regret not having met Paul Junior. I still look forward to it. He is right about Kauka-Doctor—St. Gunlaus Walters being dead. So is his dad, and Billy Cornwell and Sam Parker and Prince David and Jack London, my own particular pal.

How the years crowd on. May Neumann give us more yarns of his South Sea trailing. They ring true. It's a far cry from the St. Lawrence River with the ice pans going up and down with the tide, to the lagoon at Sans Souci.—J. ALLAN DUNN.

And Mr. Neumann replies:

Your letter to Rud took me back so many years, I feel timid about confessing them for my own sake, not yours.

Reading your work over a long period with intense appreciation I always felt there was a tie-up somewhere, and now I know.

Yes, indeed, I see them all again. Good old Towsey Mongalay with his nutty mesmeric complex, and his proofs of the calabash "tom" as a radio instrument antedating the "discovery" of sound transmission by ether waves of energy some thirty years. Unger, you know, found a *kahuna* who explained that two calabashes of the same size, filled to the same level with water, and beaten would convey sound from Kawaihae to Nukahiva in a second or less. Also Harry Gillig and his wife, Aimee Crocker. When I last saw her she was Princess Mechnikoff, or some such name, but fine and lovable and generous and loyal as ever.

Funny you missed me. But then, even between ten and sixteen, I was a notorious wanderer around the islands, and, when not at Mana, with one or other of the Parkers, was chasing sheep on Lanai or sailing to Fanning or some such out of the way place.

I don't know if you ever ran into that picturesque rascal, Tommy Evans, the Sheriff of Lahaina, but if you did you will remember that Jack London intended incorporating him into a dozen or so things that—to the pity of it—never materialized.

Looking back I must admit defeat at your hands and record. I have no seven continuous years and I never tried the copra game. The darned stuff always did smell so, and I never could unearth an honest buyer for soap from Flemington racecourse to Leverhulme, or whatever they call that factory at Birkenhead opposite Liverpool.

DO YOU recollect Ng Mon War, Dad's Chinese interpreter who, so Honolulu legend says, was

flabbergasted when Paul Sr. berated him soundly in ten Canton dialects? Also how that Celestial Machiavelli maneuvered the "Equator" out of Captain Denis Read for Robert Louis (sound the "s"), to the ultimate benefit of Tusitala and Read himself? And Sun Yat Sen when Dad took him away from Spreckelsville, at Kahului, to become a lawyer in the Neumann office on Merchant Street, a connection that culminated when my father had to take Sun out to the Macfarlane pier and from there row him beyond the line of breakers to get him aboard the old *City of Peking* away from a hundred or so Chinese knives honed for his throat?

Well, well—you're at the Chateau just above that spot marked by that plain but eloquent board that says: "Here Montgomery Fell". It's about ten years ago this month that I was there, too, waiting to cross to Levis to ride back to Ottawa with the Princess Pat's special and Hamilton Gault, soldier and gentleman de luxe.

I do hope to see you before I leave again next year for Tongatabu and some Savaii *pulsami*.

Aloha, Dunn, *Aloha nuinui*, and may your typewriter continue to sing "Home Sweet Home" for you and your scores of followers.—PAUL NEUMANN.

Peaceful Slumber!

TAKE IT STRAIGHT from Comrade van Vledder, one may find it in a Ghetto fish-market at noon hour, in one of the engine boiler factories at Schenectady—almost anywhere *except* in the bosom of an anthill!

Have just been gazing on a few copies of the good old magazine and see in *Adventure* of November 15th an inquiry and reply about man-eating ants. I thought that perhaps a little news of one of my experiences might be interesting enough to read. It happened back in March 1920 when I was on a push-bike trip from Geelong to Sydney, a bit over 600 miles. I was traveling light, ground sheet blanket and change and had had good going till my first night in New South Wales. I decided to camp about eighteen miles over the border on the main Sydney-Melbourne road, beside a small creek. Being tired I just had some cold eats that I carried, and turned in with my head on a slight mound of earth that looked innocent enough in the dusk. I dropped asleep at once but not for long, for I was awakened by an itching feeling about my neck. When I rubbed with my hand I realized that I wasn't dreaming. I had black bull ants swarming all over me, and was mad with the pain of their bites! So much so, that I dived, as I was, into where I remembered the creek to be. Lucky for me I struck a deep pool. I might have split my coco and ended my cares if I didn't. The effect of the water helped to quiet me a bit till I got my clothes off; still dancing about I sorted out my towel and shaking ants off it got to free peaceful ground and dried myself, and then charged the ants' battle field for a tin of Rescona Ointment and my ground sheet, from which I could easily shake the ants off in the dark. I then put the ointment on my neck, face and ears, and rolled up in my ground sheet about fifty yards away. I shivered till morning when I went and got my outfit together again, and found that I tried to collect some shuteye with my head on top of a bull ant nest! I travelled that day in a light singlet, well lathered in ointment, which helped to ease the murderous pain. It would have taken a horse collar to fit my neck the way it was swollen. Although the experience made me feel groggy for a day or so I had no bad effects (except pain) from it. —PHIL. M. VAN VLEDDER, Geelong, Australia.

The Frost Sleep

CLEM YORE, known personally to thousands of men in the North and in our own West—as well as for his many hundreds of articles, poems, songs and stories, arises to speak with the voice of authority. He backs up Frank R. Pierce.

Not in defense of my friend and fellow-writer, on a point of fictional-fact, contained in a story, do I arise to throw in with Frank Pierce in answer to Wm. H. Oeters objection to Pierce's story "The Winner", but I want to be loyal to the North—she's wan gran' ole countree, an', by gar, she is do what she damn well pleese; an' doan y'u got watch her too close, for she mebbe fool y'u. *Hein?*"

If a man can sleep at a camp-fire, he can freeze there. If he can hold a gun he can freeze with it in a hand. Multiplying these two conditions brings about the logicality of Frank's yarn.

In Dawson men froze, drunk, going to the creeks, and were found with grins on their mugs, and, once, a bottle in a hand, a glove dangling from a tie-string. Explain a frozen smile. Or, for that matter, a pain-twisted face.

And sleep, the frost-sleep, will come and has come to the wisest musher who ever snarled at a cold camp, or hit a blizzard in the face. The action of frost on tired brain and worn out body is as full of quirks as are the crystals in a snow storm's feathers, or the action of freezing temperatures on ice and earth. Nothing is ever the same; similar, but not identical.

I, myself, froze both cheeks, my forehead, the lobes of both ears, and the tip of my nose, and didn't know it. Yet I had been traveling for fourteen hours, carrying a forty pound pack, and wearing felt boots, inside of white rubber artics, and covered with a squirrel parka. My entire chest was a mass of sweat, when I removed that parka, and my feet were moist and warm. Until I hit the warmth of a genial cabin I hadn't the slightest idea that I was frost bitten. At another time I fell asleep at a

fire. I was awakened or I wouldn't be writing this now.

There is much to what Mr. Oeters has to say, but he doesn't seem to know that the very facts Pierce recites have been proven to be antics of the northland; just as *much* we fellows write of the northland as the exception and not the rule.

GIVE me most any spot north of 55, to the Milk River valley in Montana, when blizzards are blooming. In several sections of the United States a man can freeze quickly and "well-done"; and if you want confirmation of this seek the records of blizzards in the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas, to say nothing of Wyoming and Eastern Colorado. I have been assured by an old homesteader, that he had a pig get out of barn, during a blizzard, and the porker was found, three days later, sixty feet from the barn, in a drift, three legs on the ground, the fourth raised in the exact position a hog uses in stepping. Would Pierce or I dare print that in fiction? Yet, I receive many letters asking me to see certain old-timers for correct dope on certain early days.

But the point is, fictional-fact is not called upon to portray common knowledge of truth. It is sufficient if a writer gives the atmosphere of reality. And I think a writer who sticks too closely to geography, history, science or fact carves out for himself, and the editor of the magazine who publishes his work, a lot of letter-writing; for readers will take issue and this issue must be answered. Frank Richardson Pierce, you're all right. And so is Mr. Oeters.—CLEM YORE.

"Guddling"

EVER notice the inane expression of utter bliss that comes to the eyes and other features of an outdoors dog when you scratch him under the collar and behind the ears? Gosh, how he do enjoy it!

Seems as though the trout feels the same way, according to Comrade Dunn of our writers' brigade.

Don't like to follow a stale trail, but perhaps I can add a word or two about tickling trout. I learned to do it in Devonshire, England, almost fifty years ago. They call it guddling over there. It is practised in many English brooks and Scotch burns. In Devon the brooks are small and the speckled trout are small but now and then you get a pounder.

You find their hovers, where they lie heads up stream, in the shadowed hollow of the bank. Upstream because they breathe that way, the water flowing over their gills that extract the oxygen. You can drown a trout, choke him, big or little, if you work him so the current flows in back of his gills, lifts and closes the fringes.

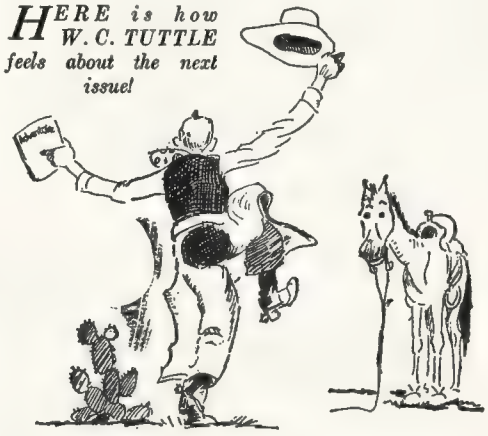
Quiet you must be, quiet and patient, lying on your belly on the bank. You bare your arm to the elbow and cover it with clay to hide the flash of whiteness. Softly you start to tickle your trout. He likes it. Softly and tenderly, like a strand of water weed your fingers creep up to his gills—and then you heave him out.

Conditions count. You can't do it in every stream, but guddling trout is a well-known trick. I term it "trick" because I am not at all sure it is sporting. I'd rather have my fellow on the end of a leader he could break if you were not clever with reel and rodtip.

But there it is. I've guddled. There are thousands who have done so. Another poaching trick: I have known men who cast, not a fly but a leader of fine wire, the sort of wire florists use, ending in a noose. They cast often from a bridge, seeing the big fellows in the pool, heads upstream. The loop cuts the water, the strike is made, the trout is literally roped, lassooed.

Call that a fish yarn if you like, but the London markets often have trout for sale that, to the initiate, show that mark of the wire loop back of the gills.—J. ALLAN DUNN.

HERE is how W. C. TUTTLE feels about the next issue!



Old-Timers' All Star Number

HAVE YOU ever longed for an issue of a magazine in which *every* author was one of your favorites? If so, lend an ear! The June first *Adventure* is one of just that sort. It contains yarns by W. C. Tuttle, Harold Lamb, Arthur O. Friel, James W. Bennett, George E. Holt, T. S. Stribling, Murray Leinster, Karl W. Detzer, James Stevens and Thomson Burtis.

I don't believe any fiction magazine can show a better line-up.

—ANTHONY M. RUD.

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Tree Oils

METHOD of procuring and refining.

Request:—"Could you tell me how to make oils out of spruce, fir, pine and other kinds of wood, or let me know where I could get some literature on this subject?"—A. J. MICHAUD, Presque Isle, Me.

Reply, by Mr. Horace Kephart:—Oils, turpentines and resins are obtained from various species of trees by distillation of the raw juice.

Most of the oil or spirits of turpentine produced in the United States comes from the long-leaf pine of the South, but it is also obtained from other kinds of pine. The process is simple:

The raw sap or juice of the tree begins to run about the middle of March and reaches its best flow in July and August. In January and February the trees are "boxed." That is, the surface of the south side of the trees is blazed for a few feet from the ground, and, at the bottom of the blaze, say four inches above ground, a cup is chopped about one-fourth the diameter of the tree. On large trees there may be several cups on opposite sides. The cup is called a "box." Oblique gutters are notched into the trees above each box to conduct the sap that flows from the wound above.

In about two weeks the boxes are filled. They are then emptied with wooden spoons. The chippings extend the first year about a foot above the box. After five or six years the tree is abandoned. Generally, 250 boxes yield one barrel (320 lbs.) of this pure dripping.

The crude dripping is then put through a still which separates the oil or spirits of turpentine from the thick resin. Six barrels of dripping yield 122 quarts of the oil.

The turpentine of the balsam fir, called Canada balsam, is procured from the "blisters" of this tree, as you doubtless know, and is cold in its original state.

Oil of cedar is obtained from the red cedar. A bushel of dried shavings, heated in an inverted iron vessel, yields one-half pint of oil.

Oil of birch is distilled from the wood and bark of the black birch (sweet birch). It is identical with oil of wintergreen and is used for the same purposes. The split wood is cut in lengths of one to two feet and placed in stills (generally wooden boxes with copper bottoms, holding 1,000 to 2,000 lbs.). These are filled to within a foot of the top and water is run in till the still is one-third full. The wood is left to soak over night, and is then distilled by a wood fire, the vapor being cooled in a metal worm by a continuous stream of water. The yield is about four pounds oil to the ton of wood.

You can get literature on turpentine, free, from the Bureau of Forestry, Washington, D. C.

Bêche-de-mer

SEA-SLUGS prized as a great delicacy by Chinese gourmets.

Request:—"I very much wish to know the process of curing bêche-de-mer—or trepang—for shipment to Chinese markets. I am expecting to make a trial shipment from these waters, and, should it be successful, organize a small company to operate in the West Indies, where I have located some quantity. If possible, I wish names of reputable firms purchasing same in Hongkong, or other ports."

—L. K. STAM, Cortez, Fla.

Reply, by Mr. L. P. B. Armit:—Yours is a surprising query, as I thought the people in your part of the world would know all about the methods of curing trepang or bêche-de-mer. However, I'll try and give you a brief description of the process, which, I may mention, if not performed properly, will make all the difference between good and bad prices for the catch. Properly cured slugs always top the market—as all other produce does. This is how it is done:

1. The slug is first gutted through the vent without cutting; the vent is enlarged with a round stick (a miniature marline-spike is what it is like) *and the interior is completely emptied.* This latter is most important, as it helps to retain the shape of slug and is an essential to proper curing.

2. The gutted slugs are then placed in a boiler of boiling *seawater.* Surf-red, prickly, mama-teat, are the first varieties to be dropped into the boiling seawater as they take longer to cook than the other varieties; then the teat is put in *when the water is off the boil.* The boiler is then allowed to come to the boil again and to remain boiling for from five to ten minutes, according to the size of the catch, i.e., the amount of fish that is in the boiler. Then, if deep-water black and tiger have been included in the catch, these two varieties are then inserted into the boiler *after the varieties previously dropped in come to the boil.* The boiler is then allowed to come to the boil and boil for a few minutes, after which all the slugs are bailed out of it, spread on deck, and cooled off quickly with sluicings of *cold* seawater. The cooling must be done quickly to prevent the fish being overcooked.

3. The slugs are now slit up the back or belly, according to which variety they are, the cut being made with a sharp knife, from end to end, *about half an inch being left uncut at each end* to help preserve the shape of the slug, which will gape too much if these end bits are sliced open.

4. Then thoroughly wash and cleanse the inside of the slug with cold seawater. When this is done, the fish are then placed in the smoke-house trays *with the cut sides uppermost.* The trays with the larger or heavier fleshed varieties are placed in the lower shelves, the fire is stoked up and plenty of heat applied to the trays of slugs for several hours, during which time the trays are interchanged to give all the slugs a thorough heating, which is most necessary to dispel the water from the flesh—an essential of successful curing.

Spreaders of split wood are used to keep the cuts open in the mama-teat and teat varieties only; these spreaders are removed after about twelve hours, and then all the slugs are turned with cut downwards and allowed to remain in the smoke-house from two to five days, according to the size and variety. During this smoking, the trays are changed about in the smoke-house daily for the first two days, and then the slugs are left in the upper trays until the smoking treatment is completed, the slugs being turned about and the trays restacked at least once every day. This latter to make sure the smoke reaches all the surface of the catch.

5. The curing is completed when the slugs are quite dry. If it is carried too far, the slug gets brittle and is spoilt. It must be nice and dry, *not baked brittle.* Experience alone can tell you when this is right; but a good illustration is, the slug must be devoid of moisture and not unlike a bit of dried leather, only not so tough and dry. If the slug will just bend without breaking, it is a little too dry; try and get the happy medium,

Trust the foregoing will help you out. The varieties I mention are those known here as the best marketable slugs. The names explain themselves.

The nearest Chinese consul can give you the addresses of the firms in Shanghai, Hongkong, and Canton, who deal in bêche-de-mer. Or your own consul in these cities could advise you, Read up the subject of bêche-de-mer in your public library; there is a lot about it in the Encyclopedia Brittanica. The best selling slugs collected here are those I've mentioned in the description of curing.

Archery

RANGE of Indian bows, and the woods used in their construction.

Request:—"Certain questions have arisen in my history and manual training classes concerning the uses and manufacture of the bow. These are questions to which I am unable to find an answer in the usual reference books. Hence, I am passing them on to you as *Adventure's* archery expert. If some of the questions do not rightly belong to your department, will you kindly tell me whom to pass them on to?

1. What were the average and the maximum ranges of the bow of the North American Indians?

2. Of what woods were their best bows made?

3. From whom may I secure detailed information regarding the manufacture of bows—and more particularly arrows—as a manual training project?

4. Can you suggest a good book or magazine on archery as a sport?"

—RALPH BROWN, Elba, Nebraska.

Reply, by Mr. Earl B. Powell:—1. The Indians never equalled the old English archers. Most of them used very weak short bows, and few of them ever shot over 200 yards, or even as far. Some exceptions, of course, such as the Florida Indians, who used the long bow.

2. On West Coast they used yew. Also used service-berry but the great majority of bows were made of hickory. Best of all and most esteemed was Osage orange.

3. I would suggest that you write to Penn Publishing Company, Philadelphia, Pa., and get "Archery" (price $5.00) by Dr. Elmer.

4. See answer to 3. Also there is a very good little magazine published now. Write to *The Sylvan Archer* at Corvallis, Oregon, for copy.

Horses

A FEW hints on their care.

Request:—"I would be pleased to receive any information you can give, in short, on the following: 1. What care should ponies and horses on a farm receive? What should and should not be given them to eat during the four seasons of the year? How much water per day, and at what time intervals before or after meals, should be given to an animal during the first ten years of its life?

2. What are the six chief maladies that affect the horse? How should a person attempt to prevent such maladies, and what should be his first treatment in each case?

3. What steps are taken to train a horse to jump?"

—JOHN H. HUGHES, Philadelphia, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Thomas H. Dameron:—1. All horses should be groomed daily. The best food for horses is a ration of from six to twelve pounds of oats, according to amount of work, and twelve to twenty pounds of good hay, according to amount of oats fed. I feed more hay when amount of oats is cut down. Individual horses and varied uses of same will regulate these amounts. Seasons will not change this much unless pasture is used, then little or no hay is necessary. If horses are not used they may keep in good condition on grass alone, but growing colts should have some oats.

A horse will drink around eight gallons of water a day. Preferably, kept before him at all times, if not, water at least fifteen minutes before feeding oats. Don't forget to keep salt where horses can get it.

2. First I would say comes the feet. "No foot, no horse". Watch for corns and cracked heels. The blacksmith will correct this.

Next, thrush, caused by dirty stables. Thrush is a diseased frog of the foot, which rots away if neglected. Keep the feet cleaned out. If the case is bad place a piece of cotton saturated in a solution of one part carbolic acid to twenty parts of water. In trivial cases, put in some Stockholm tar twice a week.

Watch for bad teeth, catarrh, or distemper, glanders, colic, lampas, sores and galls, etc. I can not cover all of them. But you can obtain bulletins from the Superintendent of Public Documents, Washington, D. C. Write him for Catalog No. 38, which will be sent free.

3. Every trainer has different methods of making horses jump. The French and Italians have very intense and scientific methods, but most Americans think it comes natural and just put them to the jump. Take a horse slowly, and increase the height slowly.

Revolver

THE English Government Proof House and its function.

Request:—"I have an old Colt revolver which is .36 cal., with the grip and trigger guard brass mounted. It is a cap and ball and the cylinder is stamped in different places with 'a Crown and P' and another stamp 'of Crown and V.' Could you advise me if there are a great many in existence and if it is of any value to collectors? This six shooter was dug up at Levis, Quebec."

—D. G. NAUSS, Pennsgrove, N. J.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—Your old Colt revolver is evidently one which has been proved at the English Government Proof House, as it is stamped to signify this process.

This is a law in England that all arms sold, whether of English or foreign make, must be given the Government proof to determine their safety to the user. This has been in effect since the early part of the seventeenth century, by the way.

Some Colts were made in London in the factory the Colonel established there in the fifties of the past century, and later sold. This may be one of them, possibly. But the .36 seems to be the most popular size in cap-and-ball Colts, from what I've seen.

I doubt it to be worth more than a dollar or so, at the outside, unless some special and well authenticated history is attached to it.

Down the Arkansas

A RIVER journey that offers much in the way of adventure.

Request:—"I expect to start from Fort Smith, Arkansas, and travel by boat down the Arkansas River to the Mississippi, then to New Orleans. This is supposed to be a vacation trip, to take anywhere from three months to a year. I expect to go up some of the smaller rivers or streams as the spirit moves me and time is to be no object, though money probably will be before it is over.

There is to be myself and wife on the trip, and I had figured on about a 15 ft. boat with an outboard motor. Can you give me any dope on them? Will the ordinary outboard motor take a 15 ft. boat up against the Mississippi?

Where will I be able to get a map of both rivers?

What kind of First Aid kit would you recommend?

Will we have to have fishing and hunting license for all three States? Are they strict on them?

How about .22 rifle and 20 gage shotgun and a .45 cal. Colt for guns—no great amount of hunting expected to be done?

We would expect to tie up at night, of course, How heavy a tent should we take with us?

Would one of the gasoline cooking outfits pay for the trouble of carrying; if so, what kind?

Is there any law in any of the three States I would travel, against selling fish taken lawfully? I figured that a flat bottomed boat would be the best for this. Do you think so? Are there any kind of regulations calling for any particular lights on small boats? Are the river thieves bad?

How are the storms on the Mississippi?"

—R. M. MCNAIR, McAlester, Okla.

Reply, by Mr. Raymond S. Spears:—Tripping down rivers is my greatest joy. Been down several, Tennessee and Mississippi and always did want to take the Arkansas one, though the quicksands always bade me pause. High water, too, has some bad aspects.

Cost of trip, probably around $1 a day up for two. But I'd have a 18- to 20-foot boat, and down below somewhere take on a shack boat of some kind. 22 ft. with a cabin, 7 feet wide, and all snug. Outboard motor'll handle up to 30 feet ordinary down current, and will work a 20-foot boat up stream against a lot of currents.

No maps of Arkansas River, except U. S. Geological Survey and probably U. S. Dept. of Engineers, Washington, D. C.; write U. S. Mississippi River Commission, St. Louis, Mo., for 1-inch to mile, Mississippi maps (dandy).

For first aid, Dr. Fordyce, Fall City, Nebraska, puts up just what one needs—but you're not likely to have any trouble but mosquitoes. Be sure and copper wire screen doors and windows.

Licenses for hunting and fishing—not so very strict except in spots, but regarding the migratory birds, the Government is mighty strict. 22, 20 gage and .45 Colts make a fine outfit.

I would sleep in the boat. A canvas over length of boat on green cane hoops, and canvas swung from gunwales, bow and stern, using a gasoline cook stove under it. You know, a lot of rains, and these are mighty uncomfortable camping when they catch you. But a 6x9 8-ounce canvas WATERPROOFED THOROUGHLY.

Flat bottom O.K. Keep out of other fellow's way. Have lantern to see by, good flash (three battery, say), and I don't think lights required.

Some mighty bad actors down there. Killers. But they keep out of way of men who keep careful watch. Keep away from the dives and lonesome bends where moonshiners work.

Storms likely to be swingers at times. Always land in protected from south around to west—under banks and clear of trees. Safest place in a gale is a big sandbar.

If you got the *Cabin Boat Primer*, from A. R. Harding, Columbus, Ohio, it'd help you a lot.

Track

SOME records and some appropriate figures for a good high school athlete.

Request: "Having been a reader of *Adventure* for quite a while, I'm taking the privilege of asking some questions on track.

I wish to know the World's champions and time, distance, or height, of their events.

I also wish to know what you consider good time distance, or height, for a fair high school athlete.

Would also like to know a good diet for an all-around high school athlete."

—RAY OWEN, Hot Springs, Ark,

Reply, by Mr. Jackson Scholz:—Records are constantly being lowered, but here are the latest as compiled by the A.A.U., together with my own idea of good time and distance for a good high school athlete:

Event	Record	Holder	High School Time
50 yds.	5⅕ sec.		5:8
100 "	9:6	Paddock	10:4
220 "	20:6	Locke	23
440 "	47:4	Meredith	53
880 "	1:51:6	Peltzer	2:5
Mile	4:10:4	Nurmi	5
High jump	6:8 ¾ ft.	Osborn	5:10 ft.
Standing high	5:5 ¾ ft.	Goehring	4:8 "
Standing broad	11:4 ⅞ ft.	Ewry	10 "
Running broad	25:10 ⅞ ft.	Hubbard	21 "
(broken in Olympics by Hamm 25:11 ft. & fraction)			
Pole vault	14 ft.	Carr	11 ft.
Shot put	52:3 ½ ft.	Kuck	38 "
Hammer	189:6,5 ft.	Ryan	115 "
Javelin	229:3 ⅛ ft.	Penttila	150 "
Discus	158:1 ¾ ft.	Houser	120 "
High hurdles	14:4 sec.	Thompson	16 "
220 Lows	23 "	Brookins	27 "

A well balanced diet is all that is necessary. Plain food is, of course, the best. Go light on rich stuff and don't eat between meals.

Sleep is also a big essential. Get at least ten hours a night.

Feldspar

THE value of a deposit depends on several important factors.

Request:—"1. I have a stone hill of almost clear feldspar which I wish to sell. This is in northern Minnesota. How should I proceed to sell this and how should I place a valuation on it?

2. Over an acre of about one mile by half a mile a dip needle stays at 20°. At one point it turns to 80° for a short space and then back to 20°. There is a thin deposit of "swamp ore" (a reddish deposit) on the rocks. What in your opinion would be the prospects for finding minerals under the surface?

3. What book on general geology would you recommend to a person who wishes to prospect around between times?"—ADAR W. ENGBERG, Oak Island, Minnesota.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—The sale value on a deposit of feldspar depends upon several things. Among these are: probable transportation costs, affected largely by distance of deposit from rail or water haulage; size and purity of feldspar deposit itself, including percentage of waste. That is, you should gage a price by size and value of deposit as affected by total cost of extraction.

Twelve States are now producing feldspar, with 94% coming from the eastern seaboard from Maine to North Carolina. Average value per long ton in Carolina is $6.08; in Maine, $8.72; in New Hampshire, $8.13. A new company in the Black Hills of South Dakota is now shipping 5000 tons annually and gets an average of $6 per ton f.o.b. the mine. The mining is open-cut work with air drills, deep holes for quantity blasts; product runs 60% waste and is hand-cobbed and sorted. Product shipped to the Innis-Speiden Co., at Murphysboro, Ill.—freight rate $6.50 per ton.

Sale might be made to some large milling outfit like the above at Murphysboro, or to another feldspar mining company. You might correspond with the Keystone Feldspar & Chemical Co., Keystone, South Dakota; or with the above buyers. If interested, they'd send their own engineers to examine and sample the ground. If favorable, they'd

name a price, and other things being equal, I'd accept such a price rather than try to jockey them out of more. You can't figure much on working such a deposit by yourself, and if you drag in others to furnish capital and experience, they'll get your shirt. Average person knows little about feldspar.

Information: Bureau of Mines publication, "Feldspar in 1927," by Jefferson Middleton, obtained for 5c from Supt. of Documents, Gov't Printing Office, Wash., D. C.

From what you describe regarding the dip-compass, I'd say there is a deposit of iron ore underneath, possibly hematite.

The prospects for finding it, if any, are good, though it should be done by one who understands use of dip-compass and the platting of underground ore bodies by mathematical calculations. An extensive series of set-ups are made and angle of needle observed. When these results are platted by angles, a map of the body is made which shows approximate area as well as probable depth below surface. The value can only be determined by sinking test pits, or boring.

"The Miner's Guide," H. J. West, $1.15 postpaid, 340 Wilcox Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif.; also, "Handbook for Prospectors," M. W. von Bernewitz, $3.00, sold by McGraw-Hill Book Co., 370 Seventh Ave., N. Y. C.; also, "Useful Minerals & Rare Ores," Alexander McLeod, $2.50, of John Wiley & Sons, 440 Fourth Ave., N. Y. C.

Mountaineering

A LETTER from Mr. Verne L. Ketchum, historian of the Mazamas mountaineering club, mentioned recently in these columns:

"We note in your February issue that you give the location of the Mazamas as being in Seattle or Tacoma. Please be advised that this mountaineering club is located in Portland, Oregon, having been organized in 1894 on the summit of Mt. Hood.

We publish a monthly bulletin giving all trips and other activities of the club. The December issue of this publication consists of an annual of about 150 pages of pictures and articles of Mazama and general mountaineering material.

The price of this annual is $1.00 and the price of the annual together with the bulletin is $1.50 per year. The price of the publication is to cover the cost of plates and printing only, as all articles and services of members are donated."

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the first issue of each month

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In it will appear as many of your favorite authors as could conveniently squeeze into one big issue. Each has for you a splendid representative story, told in his best manner. Here are a few of the writers who will be represented:

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GEORGE E. HOLT

~and others~

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